



78

REMARKS
ON THE
INTERNAL EVIDENCE
FOR THE TRUTH OF
Rebealed Religion.

1871

1871 / 1872

1871

1871 / 1872

1871 / 1872

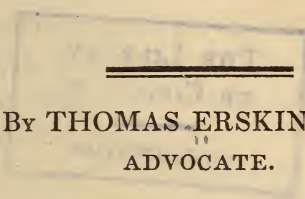
1871 / 1872

1871

REMARKS
ON THE
INTERNAL EVIDENCE

FOR THE TRUTH OF

Revealed Religion.



BY THOMAS ERSKINE, Esq.
ADVOCATE.

THE SIXTH EDITION.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED FOR WAUGH & INNES;
AND OGLE, DUNCAN & CO. LONDON.

1823.

BT 1101
E 75
1823

RECEIVED JAN 10 1871

RECEIVED JAN 10 1871

THE LIBRARY
OF CONGRESS
—
WASHINGTON

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

THERE is a principle in our nature which makes us dissatisfied with unexplained and unconnected facts ; which leads us to theorize all the particulars of our knowledge, or to form in our minds some system of causes sufficient to explain or produce the effects which we see ; and which teaches us to believe or disbelieve in the truth of any system which may be presented to us, just as it appears adequate or inadequate to afford that explanation of which we are in pursuit. We have an intuitive perception that the appearances of Nature are connected by the relation of cause and effect ; and we have also an instinctive desire to classify and arrange the seemingly confused mass of

facts with which we are surrounded, according to this distinguishing relationship. From these principles have proceeded all the theories which were ever formed by man. But these principles alone can never make a true theory: They teach us to theorize; but experience is necessary in order to theorize justly. We must be acquainted with the ordinary operation of causes, before we can combine them into a theory which will satisfy the mind. But when we are convinced of the real existence of a cause in Nature, and when we find that a class of physical facts is explained by the supposition of this cause, and tallies exactly with its ordinary operation, we resist both reason and instinct when we resist the conviction that this class of facts does result from this cause. On this process of reasoning is grounded our conviction, that the various phenomena of the heavenly bodies are results from the principle or law of gravitation. That great master of theories, Adam Smith, has given a most appropriate and beautiful illustration of this process, in his "History of Astronomy." He has there shown, how the speculative system was always accom-

modated to the phenomena which had been observed ; and how, on each new discovery in point of fact, a corresponding change necessarily took place in the form of the system.

There is another process of reasoning, differing somewhat from that which has been described, yet closely allied to it ; by which, instead of ascending from effects to a cause, we descend from a cause to effects. When we are once convinced of the existence of a cause, and are acquainted with its ordinary mode of operation, we are prepared to give a certain degree of credit to a history of other effects attributed to it, provided we can trace the connexion between them. As an illustration of this, I shall suppose, that the steam-engine, and the application of it to the movement of vessels, was known in China in the days of Archimedes ; and that a foolish lying traveller had found his way from Sicily to China, and had there seen an exhibition of a steam-boat, and had been admitted to examine the mechanical apparatus of it,—and, upon his return home, had, amongst many palpable fables, related the true par-

ticulars of this exhibition,—what feeling would this relation have probably excited in his audience? The fact itself was a strange one, and different in appearance from any thing with which they were acquainted : It was also associated with other stories that seemed to have falsehood stamped on the very face of them. What means, then, had the hearers of distinguishing the true from the false? Some of the rabble might probably give a stupid and wondering kind of credit to the whole ; whilst the judicious but unscientific hearers would reject the whole. Now, supposing that the relation had come to the ears of Archimedes, and that he had sent for the man, and interrogated him ; and, from his unorderly and unscientific, but accurate specification of boilers, and cylinders, and pipes, and furnaces, and wheels, had drawn out the mechanical theory of the steam-boat,—he might have told his friends, “ The traveler may be a liar ; but this is a truth. I have a stronger evidence for it than his testimony, or the testimony of any man : It is a truth in the nature of things. The effect which the man has described is the legiti-

mate and certain result of the apparatus which he has described. If he has fabricated this account, he must be a great philosopher. At all events, his narration is founded on an unquestionable general truth." Had the traveller committed an error in his specification, that defect would have operated as an obstacle to the conviction of Archimedes; because, where the facts which are testified constitute the parts of a system, they must, in order to produce conviction, be viewed in their relation to one another, and in their combined bearing on the general result. Unless they are thus viewed, they are not seen as they really exist,—they do not hold their proper ground. A single detached pipe or boiler or valve could not produce the effects of the steam-engine; and a man who knows no more about it than that it contains such a detached part, may very well laugh at the effects related of the whole machine; but, in truth, the fault lies in his own ignorance of the subject.

But these two processes of reasoning which have been described, are not exclusively applied to physical causes and effects:

We reason precisely in the same way with regard to men and their actions. When the history of a man's life is presented to us, we naturally theorize upon it; and, from a comparison of the different facts contained in it, we arrive at a conviction that he was actuated by ambition, avarice, benevolence, or some other principle. We know that these principles exist, and we know also their ordinary mode of operation: When, therefore, we see the operation, we refer it to the cause which best explains it. In this manner we arrange the characters with which we are acquainted under certain classes; and we anticipate the conduct of our friends when they come to be placed in certain circumstances. And when we are at a distance from any of them, and receive an account of their conduct upon some particular occasion, we give our unhesitating belief at once, if the account coincides with that abstract view which we have taken of their characters; but if it varies very considerably from or is directly opposed to that view, we refuse our immediate belief, and wait for further evidence. Thus, if we hear that a friend, in whose integrity we have

perfect confidence, has committed a dishonest action, we place our former knowledge of our friend in opposition to the testimony of our informer, and we anxiously look for an explanation. Before our minds are easy on the subject, we must either discover some circumstance in the action which may bring it under the general principle which we have formed with regard to his character, or else we must form to ourselves some new general principle which will explain it.

We reason in the same way of the intelligence of actions as we do of their morality. When we see an object obtained by means of a plan evidently adapted for its accomplishment, we refer the formation of the plan to design. We reason in this case also from the cause to the effect ; and we conclude, that a strong intelligence, when combined with a desire after a particular object, will form and execute some plan adapted to the accomplishment of that particular object. An ambitious man of talents will, we are sure, fix his desires on some particular situation of eminence, and will form some scheme fitted for its attain-

ment. If an intimate and judicious friend of Julius Cæsar had retired to some distant corner of the world, before the commencement of the political career of that wonderful man, and had there received an accurate history of every circumstance of his conduct, how would he have received it? He would certainly have believed it; and not merely because he knew that Cæsar was ambitious, but also because he could discern that every step of his progress, as recorded in the history was adapted with admirable intelligence to accomplish the object of his ambition. His belief of the history, therefore, would rest on two considerations,—first, that the object attributed by it to Cæsar corresponded with the general principle under which he had classed the moral character of Cæsar; and, secondly, that there was evident, through the course of the history, a perfect adaptation of means to an end. He would have believed just on the same principle that compelled Archimedes to believe the history of the steam-boat.

In all these processes of reasoning, we have examples of conviction, upon an evidence which is, most strictly speaking, in-

ternal,—an evidence altogether independent of our confidence in the veracity of the narrator of the facts.

Surely, then, in a system which purports to be a revelation from heaven, and to contain a history of God's dealings with men, and to develop truths with regard to the moral government of the universe, the knowledge and belief of which will lead to happiness here and hereafter, we may expect to find (if its pretensions are well founded) an evidence for its truth, which shall be independent of all external testimony. But what are the precise principles on which the internal evidence for or against a Divine revelation of religion must rest? We cannot have any internal evidence on a subject which is in all its parts and bearings and relations entirely new to us ; because, in truth, the internal evidence depends solely on our knowledge that certain causes are followed by certain effects : Therefore, if a new train of causes and effects perfectly different from any thing which we have before known, be presented to us, all our notions of probability, all our anticipations of results, and all our references to causes, by which we are

accustomed to judge of theories and histories, become utterly useless. In the hypothetical case of Archimedes deciding on the story of the steam-boat, the judgment which he may be supposed to have given was grounded on his belief that similar causes would produce similar effects, and on his experience that the causes which the traveller specified were actually followed in nature by the effects which he specified. The philosopher had never seen this *particular combination of causes* ; but he knew each distinct cause, with its distinct train of consequents ; and thus he anticipated the general result of the combination.

So also the credit attached to the narrative of Cæsar's exploits, by his distant friend, was grounded on the conviction that ambition would lead Cæsar to aim at empire, and on the knowledge that this object could not be attained except by that course which Cæsar pursued. Although the circumstances were new, he could almost have predicted, from analogy, that, whether the design proved finally successful or not, Cæsar would certainly form the

design, and construct some such plan for its accomplishment.

Our acquaintance, then, with certain causes as necessarily connected with certain effects, and our intuitive conviction that this same connexion will always subsist between these causes and effects, form the basis of all our just anticipations for the future, and of all our notions of probability and internal evidence, with regard to the systems or histories, both physical and moral, which may be presented to us.

If, then, the subject-matter of Divine revelation be entirely new to us, we cannot possibly have any ground on which we may rest our judgment as to its probability. But is this the case with that system of religion which is called Christianity? Is the object which it has in view an entirely new object? Is the moral mechanism which it employs for the accomplishment of that object, different in kind from that moral mechanism which we ourselves set to work every day upon our fellow-creatures whose conduct we wish to influence in some particular direction, or from that by which we feel ourselves to be led in the ordinary course of

providence? Is the character of the Great Being to whose inspiration this system is ascribed, and whose actions are recorded by it, entirely unknown to us, except through the medium of this revelation? Far from it. Like Archimedes in the case which I have supposed, we have never before seen this *particular combination* of causes brought to bear on this particular combination of results; but we are acquainted with each particular cause, and we can trace its distinct train of consequents; and thus we can understand the relation between the whole of the combined causes and the whole of the combined results.

The first faint outline of Christianity presents to us a view of God operating on the characters of men through a manifestation of his own character, in order that, by leading them to participate in some measure of his moral likeness, they may also in some measure participate of his happiness. Every man who believes in the existence of a Supreme Moral Governor, and has considered the relations in which this belief places him, must have formed to himself some scheme of religion analogous to

that which I have described. The indications of the divine character, in nature, and providence, and conscience, were surely given to direct and instruct us in our relations to God and his creatures. The indications of his kindness have a tendency to attract our gratitude, and the indications of his disapprobation to check and alarm us. We infer that his own character truly embodies all those qualities which he approves, and is perfectly free from all which he condemns. The man who adopts this scheme of natural religion, which, though deficient in point of practical influence over the human mind, as shall be afterwards explained, is yet true,—and who has learned from experience to refer actions to their moral causes,—is in possession of all the elementary principles which qualify him to judge of the internal evidence of Christianity. He can judge of Christianity as the rude ship-carpenter of a barbarous age could judge of a British ship of the line, or as the scientific anatomist of the eye could judge of a telescope which he had never seen before.

He who holds this scheme of natural religion, will believe in its truth (and I conceive justly), because it urges him to what is good, deters him from what is evil, and coincides generally with all that he feels and observes; and this very belief which he holds on these grounds, will naturally lead him to believe in the truth of another scheme which tends directly to the same moral object, but much more specifically and powerfully, and coincides much more minutely with his feelings and observations.

The perfect moral tendency of its doctrines, is a ground on which the Bible often rests its plea of authenticity and importance. Whatever principle of belief tends to promote real moral perfection, possesses in some degree the quality of truth. By moral perfection, I mean the perception of what is right, followed by the love of it and the doing of it. This quality, therefore, necessarily implies a true view of the relations in which we stand to all the beings with whom we are connected. In this sense, Pope's famous line is perfectly just,—“ His (faith) can't be wrong,

whose life is in the right." But it is evident, that a man may be a very useful member of this world's society, without ever thinking of the true relation in which he stands to the beings about him. Prudence, honourable feelings, and instinctive good-nature, may insure to any man, in ordinary times, an excellent reputation. But the scene of our present contemplation lies in the spiritual universe of God, and the character that we speak of must be adapted to that society. We cannot but believe that true moral perfection contains the elements of happiness in that higher state; and therefore we cannot but believe that that view of our moral relations, and of the beings to whom we are so related, which leads to this moral perfection, must be the true view. But if the attainment of this character be the important object, why lay so much stress upon any particular view? The reason is obvious: We cannot, according to the constitution of our nature, induce upon our minds any particular state of moral feeling without an adequate cause. We cannot feel anger, or love, or hatred, or fear, by simply endea-

vouring so to feel. In order to have the feeling, we must have some object present to our minds which will naturally excite the feeling. Therefore, as moral perfection consists of a combination of moral feelings (leading to correspondent action), it can only have place in a mind which is under the impression or has a present view of those objects which naturally produce that combination of feelings.

The object of this Dissertation is to analyse the component parts of the Christian scheme of doctrine, with reference to its bearings both on the character of God and on the character of man ; and to demonstrate, that its facts not only present an expressive exhibition of all the moral qualities which can be conceived to reside in the Divine mind, but also contain all those objects which have a natural tendency to excite and suggest in the human mind that combination of moral feelings which has been termed moral perfection. We shall thus arrive at a conclusion with regard to the facts of revelation, analogous to that at which Archimedes arrived with regard to the narrative of the traveller,—viz. a con-

viction that they contain a general truth in relation to the characters both of God and of man; and that therefore the Apostles must either have witnessed them, as they assert, or they must have been the most marvellous philosophers that the world ever saw. Their system is true in the nature of things, even were they proved to be impostors.

When God, through his prophet Jeremiah, refutes the pretensions of the false teachers of that day, he says,—“ If they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.” This moral tendency of its doctrines, then, is the evidence which the book itself appeals to for the proof of its authenticity; and surely it is no more than justice, that this evidence should be candidly examined. This is an evidence, also, on which the apostle Paul frequently rests the whole weight of the gospel.

According to this theory of the mode in which a rational judgment of the truth and excellence of a religion may be formed, it

is not enough to show, in proof of its authenticity, that the facts which it affirms concerning the dealings of God with his creatures, do exhibit his moral perfections in the highest degree ; it must also be shown, that these facts, when present to the mind of man, do naturally, according to the constitution of his being, tend to excite and suggest that combination of feelings which constitutes his moral perfection. But when we read a history which authoritatively claims to be an exhibition of the character of God in his dealings with men, —if we find in it that which fills and overflows our most dilated conceptions of moral worth and loveliness in the Supreme Being, and at the same time feel that it is triumphant in every appeal that it makes to our consciences, in its statements of the obliquity and corruption of our own hearts, —and if our reason farther discovers a system of powerful moral stimulants, embodied in the facts of this history, which necessarily tend to produce in the mind a resemblance to that high character which is there pourtrayed, —if we discern that the spirit of this history gives peace to the

conscience by the very exhibition which quickens its sensibility—that it dispels the terrors of guilt by the very fact which associates sin with the full loathing of the heart—that it combines in one wondrous and consistent whole our most fearful forebodings and our most splendid anticipations for futurity—that it inspires a pure and elevated and joyful hope for eternity, by those very declarations which attach a deeper and more interesting obligation to the discharge of the minutest part of human duty,—if we see that the object of all its tendencies is the perfection of moral happiness, and that these tendencies are naturally connected with the belief of its narration,—if we see all this in the gospel, we may then say that our own eyes have seen its truth, and that we need no other testimony : We may then well believe that God has been pleased, in pity to our wretchedness, and in condescension to our feebleness, to clothe the eternal laws which regulate his spiritual government, in such a form as may be palpable to our conceptions, and adapted to the urgency of our necessities.

This theory of internal evidence, though founded on analogy, is yet essentially different in almost all respects from that view of the subject which Bishop Butler has given, in his most valuable and philosophical work on the analogy between natural and revealed religion. His design was to answer objections against revealed religion, arising out of the difficulties connected with many of its doctrines, by showing that precisely the same difficulties occur in natural religion and in the ordinary course of providence. This argument converts even the difficulties of revelation into evidences of its genuineness ; because it employs them to establish the identity of the Author of Revelation and the Author of Nature. My object is quite different. I mean to show that there is an intelligible and necessary connexion between the doctrinal facts of revelation and the character of God (as deduced from natural religion), in the same way as there is an intelligible and necessary connexion between the character of a man and his most characteristic actions ; and farther, that the belief of these doctrinal facts has an intelligible and necessary

tendency to produce the Christian character, in the same way that the belief of danger has an intelligible and necessary tendency to produce fear.

Perhaps it may appear to some minds, that although all this should be admitted, little or no weight has been added to the evidence for the truth of revelation. These persons have been in the habit of thinking that the miraculous inspiration of the Scriptures is the sole point of importance : Whereas the inspiration, when demonstrated, is no more than an evidence for the truth of that system which is communicated through this channel. If the Christian system be true, it would have been so although it had never been miraculously revealed to men. This principle, at least, is completely recognized with regard to the moral precepts. The duties of justice and benevolence are acknowledged to be realities altogether independent of the enforcements of any inspired revelation. The character of God is just as immutable, and as independent of any inspired revelation, as these duties ; and so also are the acts of government proceeding from this charac-

ter. We cannot have stronger evidence for any truth whatever, than that which we have for the reality of moral obligations. Upon this basis has been reared the system of natural religion as far as relates to the moral character of God, by simply clothing the Supreme Being with all the moral excellencies of human nature in an infinite degree. A system of religion which is opposed to these moral obligations, is opposed also to right reason. This sense of moral obligation then, which is the standard to which reason instructs man to adjust his system of natural religion, continues to be the test by which he ought to try all pretensions to divine revelation. If the actions ascribed to God by any system of religion present a view of the divine character which is at variance with the idea of moral perfection, we have no reason to believe that these are really the actions of God. But if, on the contrary, they have a strong and distinct tendency to elevate and dilate our notions of goodness, and are in perfect harmony with these notions, we have reason to believe that they may be the actions of God ; because they are

intimately connected with those moral convictions which form the first principles of all our reasonings on this subject. This, then, is the first reasonable test of the truth of a religion—that it should coincide with the *moral* constitution of the human mind. But, secondly, we know, that, independently of all moral reasoning or consideration, our minds, by their *natural* constitution, are liable to receive certain impressions from certain objects when present to them. Thus, without any exercise of the moral judgment, they are liable to the impressions of love and hatred, and fear and hope, when certain corresponding objects are presented to them. And it is evident that the moral character is determined by the habitual direction which is given to these affections. Now if the actions attributed to God by any system of religion, be really such objects, as when present to the mind, do not stir the affections at all, that religion cannot influence the character, and is therefore utterly useless : If they be such as do indeed rouse the affections, but at the same time give them a wrong direction, that religion is worse than useless—it is

pernicious : But if they can be shown to be such as have a necessary tendency to excite these natural emotions on the behalf of goodness, and to draw the current of our affections and wills into this moral channel, we are entitled to draw another argument, from this circumstance, in favour of the truth of that religion ; because we may presume that God would suit his communications to the capacities and instincts of his creatures. The second test, then, of the truth of a religion, is—that it should coincide with the *physical* constitution of the human mind. But, farther, there is much moral evil and much misery in the world. There are many bad passions in the mind ; and there is a series of events continually going forward, which tend to excite a great variety of feelings. Now, a religion has one of the characters of truth, when it is accommodated to all these circumstances,—when it offers pardon without lowering the standard of moral duty ; when its principles convert the varied events into opportunities of growing in conformity to God, and of acquiring the character of happiness ; and when it tem-

pers the elevation of prosperity, and the depression of adversity. The third test, then, of the truth of a religion, is,—that it should coincide with the *circumstances* in which man is found in this world. It may be said, that a religion in which these three conditions meet, rests upon the most indisputable axioms of the science of human nature. All these conditions can be proved to meet in the religion of the Bible ; and the wide divergence from them which is so palpable in all other religious systems, philosophical as well as popular, which have come to our knowledge, is a very strong argument for the Divine inspiration of the Bible, especially when the artless simplicity of its manner, and the circumstances of the country in which it was written, are taken into consideration.

It may be proper to remark, that the acts attributed to the Divine government are usually termed “doctrines,” to distinguish them from the moral precepts of a religion.

When I make use of the terms “manifestation” and “exhibition,” which I shall have frequent occasion to do in the course

of the following observations, I am very far from meaning any thing like a mere semblance of action without the substance. In fact, nothing can be a true manifestation of the Divine character, which is not, at the same time, a direct and necessary result of the Divine principles, and a true narration of the Divine conduct. But these terms suit best with the leading idea which I wish to explain,—viz. that the facts of revelation are developments of the moral principles of the Deity, and carry an influential address to the feelings of man. The whole of their importance, indeed, hinges upon their being a reality; and it is the truth of this reality which is demonstrated by their holy consistency with the character of their Author, and their sanctifying applicability to the hearts of his creatures. I may observe also, that, in the illustrations which are introduced, I have aimed rather at a broad and general resemblance than at a minute coincidence in all particulars, which is perhaps not attainable in any comparison between earthly things and heavenly.

I. As it is a matter of the very highest importance in the study of religion, to be fully satisfied that there is a real connexion between happiness and the knowledge and love of God, I have commenced these remarks by explaining the nature of this connexion. I have here endeavoured to show, that the object of a true religion must be to present to the minds of men such a view of the character of their great Governor, as may not only enable them to comprehend the principles of his government, but may also attract their affections into a conformity with them.

II. I have made some observations on the mode in which natural religion exhibits the Divine character, and in which it appeals to the human understanding and feelings. And here I have remarked the great advantage which a general principle of morality possesses in its appeals to minds constituted like ours, when it comes forth to us in the shape of an intelligible and palpable action, beyond what it possesses in its abstract form.

III. I have attempted to show that Christianity possesses this advantage in the highest degree ; that its facts are nothing more than the abstract principles of natural religion, embodied in perspicuity and efficiency* ; and that these facts not only give a lively representation of the perfect character of God, but also contain in them-

* This last proposition which appeared as it now stands, in former editions of this work, has been subjected to considerable censure, and not without justice as it has been understood. Had I meant by this, that the facts of Christianity could have been anticipated by any one who was acquainted with the principles of natural religion—or that no new information was communicated by the gospel, I should have been opposing the claim, and giving up the importance of revelation. Man never could have discovered the plan of salvation ; but after it is revealed, he can perceive its agreement with those principles which had been previously acknowledged. That God must always act in consistency with both justice and mercy, the natural religionist believes ; but how these attributes can be brought into harmonious contact in the restoration of the guilty, he knows not. When, however, the doctrine of the cross of Christ is understood by him, he immediately recognizes in it the full maturity and development of principles which he had known in their elementary seeds. The information of the gospel is new, but not strange. Two recognized attributes of the Deity are manifested in a new connexion, but no new attribute is introduced. I should now prefer that the proposition had been expressed differently, as thus, “ That its facts do embody in perspicuity and efficiency the abstract principles of natural religion.” I am aware also that there is a considerable vagueness in the term “ natural religion ;” but there is no other word for it, and metaphysical accuracy is not of much moment here.

selves the strength of the most irresistible moral arguments that one man could address to another on any human interests.

IV. I have endeavoured to analyse some of the causes of the general indifference to or rejection of real Christianity, and to point out the sources of the multiplied mistakes which are made with regard to its nature. I have here made some observations on the indisposition of the human mind to attend to an argument which opposes any favourite inclination ; on the opposition of Christianity, to the prevailing current of the human character ; and on the bad effects arising from the common practice of deriving our notions of religion rather from the compositions of men than from the Bible. Infidels are not in general acquainted, through the Bible itself, with the system of revelation ; and therefore they are inaccessible to that evidence for it which arises out of the discovery that its doctrinal facts all tally exactly with the character which its precepts inculcate. I have here also illustrated this coincidence between the doctrines and the precepts of the Bible in several parti-

culars. If the Christian character is the character of true and immortal happiness, the system must be true which necessarily leads to that character.

V. I have endeavoured to show the need that men have for some system of spiritual renovation ; and I have inferred from the preceding argument, that no such system could be really efficient, unless it resembled Christianity in its structure and mode of enforcement.

VI. I have shown the connexion between the external and internal evidence for revelation.

ON THE
INTERNAL EVIDENCE

FOR THE TRUTH OF

Revealed Religion.

SECTION I.

WHEN it is said that happiness is necessarily and exclusively connected with a resemblance to the Divine character, it is evident that the word “happiness” must be understood in a restricted sense. It cannot be denied, that many vicious men enjoy much gratification through life; nor can it even be denied, that this gratification is derived in a great measure from their very vices. This fact is, no doubt, very perplexing, as every question must be which is connected with the origin of evil: But still, it is no more perplexing than the origin of evil, or than the hypothesis that our present life is a state of trial and discipline. Temptation to evil, evidently im-

plies a sense of gratification proceeding from evil ; and evil could not have existed without this sense of gratification connected with it. So, also, this life could not be a state of trial and discipline in good, unless there were some inducement or temptation to evil,—that is, unless there were some sense of gratification attending evil. It probably does not lie within the compass of human faculties to give a completely satisfactory answer to these questions ; whilst yet it may be rationally maintained, that if there is a propriety in this life being a state of discipline, there must also be a propriety in sin being connected with a sense of gratification. But then, may not this vicious gratification be extended through eternity, as well as through a year or an hour ? I cannot see any direct impossibility in this supposition, on natural principles ; and yet I feel that the assertion of it sounds very much like the contradiction of an intuitive truth.

There is a great difference between the happiness enjoyed with the approbation of conscience, and that which is felt without it or against it. When the conscience is

very sensitive, the gratification arising from vice cannot be very great : The natural process, therefore, by which such gratification is obtained or heightened, is by lulling or deadening the conscience. This is accomplished by habitually turning the attention from the distinction of good and evil, and directing it to the circumstances which constitute vicious gratification.

The testimony of conscience is that verdict which every man returns for or against himself upon the question, whether his moral character has kept pace with his moral judgment ? This verdict will therefore be, in relation to absolute moral truth, correct or incorrect, in proportion to the degree of illumination possessed by the moral judgment ; and the feeling of remorse will be more or less painful, according to the inequality which subsists between the judgment and the character. When a man, therefore, by dint of perseverance, has brought his judgment down to the level of his character, and has trained his reason to call evil good and good evil, he has gained a victory over conscience, and expelled remorse. If he could maintain this advan-

tage through his whole existence, his conduct would admit of a most rational justification. But then, his peace is built solely on the darkness of his moral judgment ; and therefore, all that is necessary in order to make him miserable, and to stir up a civil war within his breast, would be to throw such a strong and indubious light on the perfect character of goodness, as might extort from him an acknowledgment of its excellency, and force him to contrast with it his own past history and present condition. Whilst his mental eye is held in fascination by this glorious vision, he cannot but feel the anguish of remorse ; he cannot but feel that he is at fearful strife with some mighty and mysterious being, whose power has compelled even his own heart to execute vengeance on him ; nor can he hide from himself the loathsomeness and pollution of that spiritual pestilence, which has poisoned every organ of his moral constitution. He can hope to escape from this wretchedness, only by withdrawing his gaze from the appalling brightness ; and, in this world, such an attempt can generally be made with success. But suppose him to

be placed in such circumstances that there should be no retreat—no diversity of objects which might divert or divide his attention—and that, wherever he turned, he was met and fairly confronted by this threatening Spirit of Goodness,—it is impossible that he could have any respite from misery, except in a respite from existence. If this should be the state of things in the next world, we may form some conception of the union there between vice and misery.

Whilst we stand at a distance from a furnace, the effect of the heat on our bodies gives us little uneasiness ; but as we approach it, the natural opposition manifests itself, and the pain is increased by every step that we advance. The complicated system of this world's business and events, forms, as it were, a veil before our eyes, and interposes a kind of moral distance between us and our God, through which the radiance of his character shines but indistinctly, so that we can withhold our attention from it if we will : The opposition which exists between his perfect holiness and our corrupt propensities, does

not force itself upon us at every step : His views and purposes may run contrary to ours ; but as they do not often meet us in the form of a direct and personal encounter, we contrive to ward off the conviction that we are at hostility with the Lord of the Universe, and think that we may enjoy ourselves in the intervals of these much-dreaded visitations, without feeling the necessity of bringing our habits into a perfect conformity with his. But when death removes this veil, by dissolving our connexion with this world and its works, we may be brought into a closer and more perceptible contact with Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. In that spiritual world, we may suppose, that each event, even the minutest part of the whole system of government, will bear such an unequivocal stamp of the Divine character, that an intelligent being, of opposite views and feelings, will at every moment feel itself galled and thwarted and born down by the direct and overwhelming encounter of this all-pervading and almighty mind. And here it should be remembered, that the Divine government does not, like human author-

ity, skim the surface, nor content itself with an unresisting exterior and professions of submission; but comes close to the thoughts, and carries its summons to the affections and the will, and penetrates to those recesses of the soul, where, whilst we are in this world, we often take a pride and a pleasure in fostering the unyielding sentiments of hatred and contempt, even towards that superiority of force which has subdued and fettered and silenced us.

The man who believes in revelation, will, of course, receive this view as the truth of God; and even the unbeliever in revelation, if he admits the existence of an Almighty Being of a perfect moral character, and if he see no unlikelihood in the supposition that the mixture of good and evil, and the process of moral discipline connected with it, are to cease with this stage of our being, even he cannot but feel that there is a strong probability in favour of such an anticipation.

We see, then, how vicious men may be happy to a certain degree in this world, and yet be miserable in the next, without supposing any very great alteration in the

general system of God's government, and without taking into account any thing like positive infliction as the cause of their misery. And it may be observed, that this view gives to vice a form and an extent and a power very different from what is generally ascribed to it amongst men. We are here conversant chiefly about externals; and therefore the name of vice is more commonly applied to external conduct than to internal character. But, in the world of spirits, it is not so. *There*, a dissonance in principle and object from the Father of Spirits, constitutes vice, and is identified with unhappiness. So that a man who has here passed a useful and dignified life, upon principles different from those of the Divine character, must, when under the direct action of that character, feel a want of adjustment and an opposition which cannot but mar or exclude happiness. Thus, also, the effects of pride, of vanity, or of selfishness, when combined with prudence, may often be most beneficial in the world; and yet, if these principles are in opposition to God's character, they must disqualify the minds in which

they reign for participating in the joys of heaven. The joys of heaven are described in Scripture to consist in a resemblance to God, or in a cheerful and sympathising submission to his will; and as man naturally follows the impulse of his own propensities, without reference to the will of God, it is evident that a radical change of principle is necessary, in order to capacitate him for that happiness.

It was to produce this necessary and salutary change, that the gospel was sent from Heaven. It bears upon it the character of God. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that those whose principles are opposed to that character, should also be opposed to the gospel. Christianity thus anticipates the discoveries of death: It removes the veil which hides God from our sight; it brings the system of the spiritual world to act upon our consciences; it presents us with a specimen of God's higher and interior government; it gives us a nearer view of his character in its true proportions, and thus marks out to us the points in which we differ from him; it condemns with his authority; it smiles and in-

vites with his uncompromising purity. The man who dislikes all this, will reject Christianity, and replace the veil, and endeavour to forget the awful secrets which it conceals; and may perhaps be only at last roused from his delusion, by finding himself face to face before the God whose warnings he had neglected, and whose offers of friendship he had disregarded,—offers which, had they been accepted, would have brought his will into concord with that sovereign will which rules the universe, and fitted him to take a joyful and sympathising interest in every part of the Divine administration.

Of the attractive and overcoming loveliness of the character of God, as revealed in his word, and of the invitations which he makes to sinners, I shall speak afterwards; but in the mean time, I would draw the attention of the reader to the serious consideration of the fact, that a dissonance in principle from the Ruler of the Universe, cannot but be connected with some degree of unhappiness. Although I believe that few minds will feel much difficulty in acquiescing in some measure in the truth of this remark, and although there is no intri-

cacy in the reasoning connected with it, yet as distinct conceptions on this subject are of prime importance in all views of religion, I shall illustrate it by an analogy drawn from the more palpable and better understood affairs of this material world, with which we are surrounded. We may find striking examples to this purpose in a period of English history, which was distinguished above all others for the remarkable contrasts which it exhibited in public sentiment and principle amongst the different classes of the nation, and is therefore peculiarly fitted for elucidating the effects produced on happiness, by an opposition in principle between the ruling power and a part of its subjects.

It is easy to imagine the stern and composed satisfaction with which a thorough partisan of Cromwell would contemplate the rigid and formal solemnity which overspread the Government and the people of England during the Protectorship. But whence did this satisfaction arise? Certainly from that concord which subsisted between his own habits and those of the ruling power. His views and inclinations coincid-

ed at all points with those of the Government; and therefore every measure of administration was a source of gratification to him, because it was in fact an expression of his own will. He was thus in a state of political happiness; and had there been no higher government than the Commonwealth, through the universe or through eternity, he must have been perfectly and permanently happy. Now, let us carry forward this same individual to the days of Charles the Second, and place him in the near neighbourhood of that gay and dissolute court. We can in this situation suppose him moving about with a double measure of gloom in his countenance, and with a heart imbittered by the general mirth, and irritated by the continual encounter of character and opinions and habits directly opposed to his own. He retires to a distance from the seat of Government, and endeavours to hide himself from these painful conflicts in the bosom of his family. There the arrangements are all conducted according to his own principles and his own taste; and he enjoys a tolerable state of happiness, though liable to occasional in-

interruptions from public news, from whispers that he is to be apprehended on suspicion of treason, from the intrusion of Government officers, and from a want of thorough sympathy on political subjects even perhaps in the members of his own domestic circle. All at once, his quiet is destroyed by an order from court to leave his seclusion, and reside in the metropolis, that he may be more immediately under the eye of Government. Here again he is brought face to face with all that he hates and despises. His aversion is increased by a sense of his inability to resist ; and he learns even to cherish the feeling and habit of misery as the only testimony that his soul is unsubdued. He is politically miserable. I have given this sketch as an illustration of those natural laws which make our happiness dependent on our sympathy with a power which overrules us ; and also as an example of the form and the precariousness of that process by which we can in some circumstances contract our horizon, as it were, and shut out from our view those things which give us pain, and withdraw ourselves from the encounter of those prin-

ciples which are in opposition to our own. In the field of this world, there are many divisions and subdivisions, separated by strong barriers from each other, and acknowledging different authorities, or the same authority perhaps in different degrees. There are so many shelters to which men may betake themselves, when pursued by the justice or injustice of their fellow-creatures. But whilst we continue within the scope of one authority, although we may find a temporary asylum against its enmity in a narrower circle or more private society, we are continually liable to be confronted by it, and dragged from our hiding-place ; and must therefore, from the nature of things, be in some measure dependent on it for our happiness.

Whenever the material world and its concerns are made use of to illustrate the concerns of the mind and of the invisible world, it is of great importance to preserve in lively recollection the essential difference which separates the two subjects. The one embraces outward actions exclusively ; whilst the prominent feature in the other is the principle from which the actions spring.

Thus, in the example which has just been given, we can easily suppose that Cromwell's followers were actuated by a great variety of motives, and that the solemnity of the Commonwealth might captivate different minds on very different principles. Some pious people might have liked it, from having associated it in their minds with true religion ; some from the fanatical idea, that this outward form would atone for more secret sins ; some, from its mixture with republican sturdiness ; and some, from a hatred of Popery or of the Stuart family. Now, these principles are all very different in their nature, although their external results might in some particulars resemble each other ; and therefore the happiness of the citizens did not proceed from an actual *sympathy of principle* with the Government, but *from a coincidence in the effects* of their principles : And if the Government had had cognizance and control of the mind as well as the body, then those alone could have been happy, or could have been considered as good citizens, who liked that solemn system of things precisely on the same principles with the Government ;

and the collision of opposite principle would in this case have been as violent as the collision of external conduct actually was. In morals, an action does not mean an effect simply, but a principle carried into exercise; and therefore, in a government of minds, any effect produced by pride, for instance, however beneficial to the public, would get the name of a proud action, and would be condemned by a judge who disapproved of pride. Man cannot see into the heart; and therefore he is obliged to conjecture or guess at principles by their effects; but yet his judgment is always determined by the nature of the principle to which he ascribes the effects. Supposing, then, that we were under such a supernaturally gifted government, and that this government was so strong that the idea of resisting or escaping it involved an absurdity,—it would evidently become a matter of the very highest importance, to make ourselves accurately acquainted with its principles, and to accommodate our own to them; because, till this were accomplished, we could never enjoy tranquillity, but must continually suffer the uneasiness of being reluctantly borne down

by the current of a will more powerful than our own. This object, however, would be attended by considerable difficulty. In the first place, it could not be very easy to discover the precise principles of the administration: Almost any single act might proceed from a great variety of principles; and it would therefore require a long observation and induction of facts, in order to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. And, in the second place, after we had discovered those principles, we might chance to find that they were in direct opposition to our own.

In these circumstances, it would be most desirable that the Government should, for the information of the people, embody in one interesting train of action the whole of the principles of its Administration; so that an unequivocal and distinct idea of these principles might be conveyed, by the narrative, to any one who would carefully consider its purport. After Government had done this, it would evidently be the interest and the duty of all the subjects to dwell much upon the history thus communicated to them, in order that they might

in this way familiarize their minds to the principles developed in it, and teach their own thoughts to run in the same channel, and interest their affections and feelings in it as much as possible. The people would engage in this with greater or less earnestness, according to the strength or weakness of the conviction which each one had as to the reality of the connexion which subsisted between happiness and the accomplishment of this object, and also in proportion to their persuasion that this history was a true representation of the character of the Government. Approbation and affection could alone constitute the necessary adjustment: Fear might urge to the prosecution of the object, but the complete harmony of the will is the result of a more generous principle. If we suppose, farther, that this complete harmony of sentiment is one of the great objects of Government, then a coincidence on the part of the subjects, unless connected with a distinct intention to coincide, could not contain in itself the elements of a complete harmony, because it did not embrace this great object of the Government.

SECTION II.

I HAVE made these remarks for the purpose of illustrating the object of the Christian revelation, and of explaining the necessity of believing its announcement, in order to the full accomplishment of that object in each individual case. The object of Christianity is to bring the character of man into harmony with that of God. To this end, it is evidently necessary that a just idea of the Divine character should be formed. The works of creation, the arrangements of providence, and the testimony of conscience, are, if thoroughly weighed, sufficient to give this idea: But men are in general so much occupied by the works, that they forget their great Author; and their characters are so opposed to his, that they turn away their eyes from the contemplation of that purity which condemns them. And even in the most favourable cases, the moral efficiency of the

idea presented by these natural lights, is much hindered and weakened by the abstractness and vagueness of its form.

When we look into creation or providence, for the indications of God's character, we are struck with the mixture of appearances which present themselves. We see on one side, life, health, happiness; and on the other, death, disease, pain, misery. The first class furnishes us with arguments for the goodness of God; but what are we to make of the opposite facts? The theory on this subject which is attended with fewest difficulties, is founded on two suppositions,—first, That moral good is necessary to permanent happiness; and second, That misery is the result of moral evil, and was appointed by the Author of Nature as its check and punishment. This theory throws some light on the character both of God and of man. It represents God not merely as generally solicitous for the happiness of men, but as solicitous to lead them to happiness through the medium of a certain moral character, which is the object of his exclusive approbation; and it represents man as very sinful, by holding forth the

mass of natural evil in the world as a sort of measure of his moral deficiency ; and suggests that the disease must be indeed virulent, when so strong a medicine is necessary. The fact, however, that the greatest natural evil does not always fall where moral evil is most conspicuous, whilst it gives rise to the idea of a future state, does nevertheless obscure, in some degree, our ideas of the Divine character. Our notion of the goodness of God, according to natural religion, does not then arise so much from the knowledge of any one distinct unequivocal manifestation of that quality, as from a general comparison of many facts, which, when combined, lead to this conclusion. This remark applies also to our notion of the Divine holiness, or God's exclusive approbation of one particular character ; though not to the same extent,—because conscience comes much more directly to the point here than reason does in the other case. The excitements and motives arising out of such a comparison as has been described, cannot be nearly so vivid or influential as those which spring from the belief of a simple and unequivocal

cal fact which recurs to us without effort, and unfolds its instruction without obscurity, and which holds out to us an unvarying standard, by which we may at all times judge of the thoughts and intentions of God in his dealings with men. Natural theology, therefore, becomes almost necessarily rather a subject of metaphysical speculation than a system of practical principles. It marks the distinctions of right and wrong; but it does not efficiently attach our love to what is right, nor our abhorrence to what is wrong. We may frequently observe real serious devotedness, even amongst the professors of the most absurd superstitions; but it would be difficult to find a devoted natural religionist. The reason is, that these superstitions, though they have no relation to the true character of God, have yet some applicability to the natural constitution of man. Natural religion possesses the former qualification in much greater perfection than the latter. Under an impression of guilt, a man who has no other religious knowledge than that which unassisted reason affords, must feel much perplexity and em-

barrassment. He believes that God is gracious; but the wounds which he feels in his own conscience, and the misery which he sees around him, demonstrate also that God is of a most uncompromising purity. He knows not what to think; and he is tempted either to despair, or to turn his thoughts away entirely from so alarming a subject. All these conditions of mind—despair, thoughtlessness, and perplexity—are equally adverse to the moral health of the soul, and are equally opposed to that zealous and cheerful obedience which springs from gratitude for mercy, and esteem for holy and generous worth. In such circumstances, the mind would naturally, in self-defence, contrive to lower its standard of moral duty down to the level of its own performances; or would settle into a gloomy hostility to a lawgiver who requires more from it than it is disposed to render. It is in this form of weakness and perversion that we generally see natural religion; and we need not wonder at this melancholy phenomenon, when we consider that its principles consist in abstract conclusions of the intellect, which make no powerful appeal to the heart.

A single definite and intelligible action gives a vividness and power to the idea of that moral character which it exhibits, beyond what could be conveyed by a multitude of abstract descriptions. Thus the abstract ideas of patriotism and integrity make but an uninteresting appearance, when contrasted with the high spectacle of heroic worth which was exhibited in the conduct of Regulus, when, in the senate of his country, he raised his solitary voice against those humbling propositions of Carthage, which, if acquiesced in, would have restored him to liberty, and which, for that single reason, had almost gained an acquiescence ; and then, unsubdued alike by the frantic entreaties of his family, the weeping solicitations of the admiring citizens, and the appalling terrors of his threatened fate, he returned to Africa, rather than violate his duty to Rome and the sacredness of truth.

In the same way, the abstract views of the Divine character, drawn from the observation of nature, are in general rather visions of the intellect than efficient moral principles in the heart and conduct ; and however true they may be, are uninterest-

ing and unexciting, when compared with the vivid exhibition of them in a history of definite and intelligible action.

To assist our weakness, therefore, and to accommodate his instructions to the principles of our nature, God has been pleased to present to us a most interesting series of actions, in which his moral character, as far as we are concerned, is fully and perspicuously embodied. In this narration, the most condescending and affecting and entreating kindness, is so wonderfully combined with the most spotless holiness, and the natural appeals which emanate from every part of it, to our esteem, our gratitude, our shame, and our interest, are so urgent and constraining, that he who carries about with him the conviction of the truth and reality of this history, possesses in it a principle of mighty efficiency, which must subdue and harmonize his mind to the will of that Great Being whose character is there depicted.

The delineation of the character of an overruling authority, whatever that character may be, makes a strong appeal to the subjects, on the score of their interest : It

calls upon them, as they value their happiness, to bring their own views into conformity with it. The appeal becomes more forcible and effectual, if the character which they are thus called on to contemplate be such a one as would naturally excite esteem and affection in an uninterested observer. But the weight of the appeal is infinitely increased, when this powerful and amiable Being is represented to them in the attitude of a benefactor, exerting this power and putting forth this character on their own peculiar behalf.

It is thus that the character of God is represented in the New Testament ; and it is on these grounds that we are called on to love, to obey, and to imitate him. If God's character be in fact such as is there described, then those who reject the history in which this character is developed, shut themselves out from the opportunity of familiarizing their minds to the Divine government, and of bringing their affections and their views to harmonize with it.

There is a divine beauty and wisdom in the form in which God has chosen to communicate the knowledge of his character,

which, when duly considered, can scarcely fail of exciting gratitude and admiration. The object of the gospel is to bring man into harmony with God ; the subject of its operations, therefore, is the human heart in all its various conditions. It addresses the learned and the unlearned, the savage and the civilized, the decent and the profligate ; and to all it speaks precisely the same language. What then is this universal language ? It cannot be the language of metaphysical discussion, or what is called abstract moral reasoning ; for this could be intelligible to few, and it could influence the characters of fewer. The principles which it addresses ought evidently to be such as are in a great measure independent of the extremes of cultivation and barbarism ; and, in point of fact, they are so. They are indeed the very principles which Mr. Hume designates to be, “ a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought or understanding is able either to produce or to prevent.” (Inquiry into Human Understanding, sect. v. part 1.) Its argument consists in a relation of facts : If these are really believed, the

effect on the character necessarily follows. It presents a history of wondrous love, in order to excite gratitude ; of high and holy worth, to attract veneration and esteem : It presents a view of danger, to produce alarm ; of refuge, to confer peace and joy ; and of eternal glory, to animate hope.

SECTION III.

THE reasonableness of a religion seems to me to consist in there being a direct and natural connexion between a believing the doctrines which it inculcates, and a being formed by these to the character which it recommends. If the belief of the doctrines has no tendency to train the disciple in a more exact and more willing discharge of its moral obligations, there is evidently a very strong probability against the truth of that religion. In other words, the doctrines ought to tally with the precepts, and to contain in their very substance some urgent motives for the performance of them; because, if they are not of this description, they are of no use. What is the history of another world to me, unless it have some intelligible relation to my duties or happiness? If we apply this standard to the various religions which different nations have framed for themselves, we shall find very

little matter for approbation, and a great deal for pity and astonishment. The very states which have chiefly excelled in arts and literature and civil government, have failed here most lamentably. Their moral precepts might be very good ; but then these precepts had as much connexion with the history of astronomy as with the doctrines of their religion. Which of the adventures of Jupiter, or Brama, or Osiris, could be urged as a powerful motive to excite a high moral feeling, or to produce a high moral action ? The force of the moral precepts was rather lessened than increased by the facts of their mythology. In the religion of Mahomet there are many excellent precepts ; but it contains no illustration of the character of God, which has any particular tendency beyond or even equal to that of natural religion to enforce these precepts. Indeed, one of the most important doctrines which he taught,—viz. a future life beyond the grave,—from the shape which he gave to it, tended to counteract his moral precepts. He described it as a state of indulgence in sensual gratifications, which never cloyed the ap-

petite ; and yet he preached temperance and self-denial. It is evident, that any self-restraint which is produced by the belief of this doctrine, must be merely external ; for the real principle of temperance could not be cherished by the hope of indulgence at a future period. The philosophical systems of theology are no less liable to the charge of absurdity than the popular superstitions. No one can read Cicero's work on the nature of the gods, without acknowledging the justice of the Apostle's sentence upon that class of reasoners,—“ professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”

As the principles and feelings of our nature, which are addressed in religion, are precisely the same with those which are continually exercised in the affairs of this world, we may expect to find a resemblance between the doctrines of a true religion and the means and arguments by which a virtuous man acquires an influence over the characters and conduct of his fellow-creatures. When a man desires another to do any thing, that is the precept ; when he enforces it by any mode of persuasion,

that is the doctrine. When the Athenians were at war with the Heraclidæ, it was declared by the Oracle, that the nation whose king died first should be victorious in the contest. As soon as this was known, Codrus disguised himself, went over to the camp of the enemy, and exposed himself there to a quarrel with a soldier, who killed him without knowing who he was. The Athenians sent to demand the body of their king; which so alarmed the Heraclidæ, from the recollection of the Oracle, that they fled in disorder. Now, let us suppose that Codrus wished to inculcate the principle of patriotism in his countrymen. If he had merely issued a proclamation, commanding every citizen to prefer the interest of his country to his own life, he would have been giving them a moral precept, but without a corresponding doctrine. If he had joined to this proclamation, the promise of honour and wealth as the rewards of obedience, he would have been adding a very powerful doctrine, yet nevertheless such a doctrine as must have led much more directly to patriotic conduct than to patriotic feeling and prin-

ciple. Vanity and avarice, without patriotism, might have gained those rewards: But if he wished to excite or to cherish the principle of patriotism in the hearts of his people, he chose the most eloquent and prevailing argument, when he sacrificed his life for them, and thus attracted their admiration and gratitude to that spirit which animated his breast, and their love to that country, of which he was at once the representative and the ransom.

It is indeed a striking and yet an undeniable fact, that we are comparatively little affected by abstract truths in morality. The cry of a child will produce a greater movement, in almost any mind, than twenty pages of unanswerable reasoning. An instinctive acquaintance with this fact guides us in our dealings with our fellow-creatures; and He who formed the heart of man, has attested his revealed word, by showing his acquaintance with the channel through which persuasion and instruction might be most effectually communicated. It may therefore be useful to illustrate, at greater length, the analogy which exists between the persuasions of the gospel, and those

which might be fixed on as the most powerful arguments capable of being addressed to any human feelings on the subject of human interests.

Let us, then, present to ourselves a company of men travelling along the sea-shore. One of them, better acquainted with the ground than the rest, warns them of quicksands, and points out to them a landmark which indicated the position of a dangerous pass. They, however, see no great reason for apprehension ; they are anxious to get forwards, and cannot resolve upon making a considerable circuit in order to avoid what appears to them an imaginary evil : they reject his counsel, and proceed onwards. In these circumstances, what argument ought he to use ? What mode of persuasion can we imagine fitted to fasten on their minds a strong conviction of the reality of their danger, and the disinterested benevolence of their adviser ? His words have been ineffectual ; he must try some other method ; he must act. And he does so ; for, seeing no other way of prevailing on them, he desires them to wait only a single moment, till they see the

truth of his warning confirmed by his fate. He goes before them : he puts his foot on the seemingly firm sand, and sinks to death. This eloquence is irresistible : He was the most active and vigorous among them ; if any one could have extricated himself from the difficulty, it was he ; they are persuaded ; they make the necessary circuit, bitterly accusing themselves of the death of their generous companion ; and during their progress, as often as these landmarks occur, his nobleness and their own danger rise to their minds, and secure their safety. Rashness is now not perilous merely,—it is ungrateful ; it is making void the death of their deliverer.

To walk without God in the world, is to walk in sin ; and sin is the way of danger. Men had been told this by their own consciences, and they had even partially and occasionally believed it ; but still they walked on. Common arguments had failed ; the manifestations of the Divine character in creation and providence, and the testimony of conscience, had been in a great measure disregarded : It thus seemed necessary, that a stronger appeal should be

made to their understanding and their feelings. The danger of sin must be more strikingly and unequivocally demonstrated; and the alarm excited by this demonstration must be connected with a more kindly and generous principle, which may bind their affections to that God from whom they have wandered. But how is this to be done? What more prevailing appeal can be made? Must the Almighty Warner demonstrate the evil of sin, by undergoing its effects? Must he prove the danger of sin, by exhibiting himself as a sufferer under its consequences? Must he who knew no sin suffer as a sinner, that he might persuade men that sin is indeed an evil?—It was even so. God became man, and dwelt amongst us. He himself encountered the terrors of guilt, and bore its punishment; and called on his careless creatures to consider and understand the evil of sin, by contemplating even its undeserved effects on a being of perfect purity, who was over all, God blessed for ever. Could they hope to sustain that weight which had crushed the Son of God? Could they rush into that guilt and that danger against

which he had so pathetically warned them? Could they refuse their hearts and their obedience to him who had proved himself so worthy of their confidence?—especially when we consider that this great Benefactor is ever present, and sees the acceptance which this history of his compassion meets with in every breast, rejoicing in those whose spirits are purified by it, and still holding out the warning of his example to the most regardless.

Ancient history tells us of a certain king who made a law against adultery, in which it was enacted that the offender should be punished by the loss of both eyes. The very first offender was his own son. The case was most distressing; for the king was an affectionate father, as well as a just magistrate. After much deliberation and inward struggle, he finally commanded one of his own eyes to be pulled out and one of his son's. It is easier to conceive than to describe what must have been the feelings of the son in these most affecting circumstances. His offence would appear to him in a new light; it would appear to him not simply as connected with painful conse-

quences to himself, but as the cause of a father's sufferings, and as an injury to a father's love. If the king had passed over the law altogether, in his son's favour, he would have exhibited no regard for justice, and he would have given a very inferior proof of affection. We measure affection by the sacrifice which it is prepared to make, and by the resistance which it overcomes. If the sacrifice had been made, and the resistance overcome secretly in the heart of the king, there could have been but little evidence of the real existence either of principle or of affection ; and the son might perhaps have had reason to think, that his pardon was as much the effect of his father's disregard of the law as of his affection to him ; and at any rate, even if he had given the fullest credit to the abstract justice and kindness which were combined in his acquittal, it is impossible that this theoretical character of his father could have wrought on his heart any impression half so energetic, or interesting, or overwhelming, as that which must have been produced by the simple and unequivocal and practical exhibition of worth which has been record-

ed. If we suppose that the happiness of the young man's life depended on the eradication of this criminal propensity, it is not easy to imagine how the king could more wisely or more effectually have promoted this benevolent object. The action was not simply a correct representation of the king's character,—it also contained in itself an appeal most correctly adapted to the feelings of the criminal. It justified the king in the exercise of clemency ; it tranquillized the son's mind, as being a pledge of the reality and sincerity of his father's gracious purposes towards him ; and it identified the object of his esteem with the object of his gratitude. Mere gratitude, unattracted by an object of moral worth, could never have stamped an impression of moral worth on his character ; which was his father's ultimate design. We might suppose the existence of this same character without its producing such an action ; we might suppose a conflict of contending feelings to be carried on in the mind without evidencing, in the conduct flowing from it, the full vehemence of the conflict, or defining the adjustment of the

contending feelings ; but we cannot suppose any mode of conduct so admirably fitted to impress the stamp of the father's character on the mind of the son, or to associate the love of right and the abhorrence of wrong with the most powerful instincts of the heart. The old man not only wished to act in perfect consistency with his own views of duty, but also to produce a salutary effect on the mind of his son ; and it is the full and effectual union of these two objects which forms the most beautiful and striking part of this remarkable history.

There is a singular resemblance between this moral exhibition and the communication which God has been pleased to make of himself in the gospel. We cannot but love and admire the character of this excellent prince, although we ourselves have no direct interest in it ; and shall we refuse our love and admiration to the King and Father of the human race, who, with a kindness and condescension unutterable, has, in calling his wandering children to return to duty and to happiness, presented to each of us a like aspect of tenderness

and purity, and made use of an argument which makes the most direct and irresistible appeal to the most familiar, and at the same time the most powerful principles in the heart of man ?

In the gospel, God is represented in the combined character of a gracious parent and a just judge. His guilty children are arraigned before him and condemned : They have not only forfeited all claim to his favour, by the breach of that fundamental law which binds all intelligent creatures to love and resemble their Creator ; but they have also by the same means contracted the disease of sin, and lost that mental health which can alone capacitate for spiritual enjoyment. Thus, the consistency of their Judge, and their own diseased condition, seemed equally to cover their futurity with a pall of the deepest mourning. This disease constituted their punishment. Pardon, whilst this disease remained, was a mere name : Mercy, therefore, if at all communicated, must be communicated in such a way as to heal this disease—in such a way as to associate sin with the abhorrence of the heart, and duty with the love of the

heart. The exhibition of the Divine character in this dispensation of mercy, must not only be consistent with its own excellence, but also suited to make an impression on the reason and the feelings of the guilty. And it is so. The Judge himself bore the punishment of transgression, whilst he published an amnesty to the guilty, and thus asserted the authority and importance and worth of the law, by that very act which beamed forth love unspeakable, and displayed a compassion which knew no obstacle but the unwillingness of the criminals to accept it. The Eternal Word became flesh ; and exhibited, in sufferings and in death, that combination of holiness and mercy, which believed, must excite love, and if loved, must produce resemblance.

A pardon without a sacrifice, could have made but a weak and obscure appeal to the understanding or the heart. It could not have demonstrated the evil of sin ; it could not have demonstrated the graciousness of God ; and therefore it could not have led man either to hate sin or to love God. If the punishment as well as the criminality of sin consists in an opposition to the cha-

racter of God, the fullest pardon must be perfectly useless, whilst this opposition remains in the heart ; and the substantial usefulness of the pardon will depend upon its being connected with such circumstances as may have a natural and powerful tendency to remove this opposition, and create a resemblance. The pardon of the gospel is connected with such circumstances ; for the sacrifice of Christ has associated sin with the blood of a benefactor, as well as with our own personal sufferings,—and obedience with the dying entreaty of a friend breathing out a tortured life for us, as well as with our own unending glory in his blessed society. This act, like that in the preceding illustration, justifies God as a lawgiver in dispensing mercy to the guilty ; it gives a pledge of the sincerity and reality of that mercy ; and, by associating principle with mercy, it identifies the object of gratitude with the object of esteem, in the heart of the sinner. It may also here be observed, that the resurrection and ascension of Christ, as the representative of our race, not only demonstrate the Divine complacency in the work of the Saviour, but ex-

hibit to us also the indissoluble connexion which subsists between immortal glory and an entire unreserved acquiescence in the will of God ; and thus the Christian hope is not directed to an undefined ease and enjoyment in heaven, but to a defined and intelligible happiness springing from the more perfect exercise of those very principles of love to God and man, which formed the character of their Master, and still constitute his joy.

The distinction of persons in the Divine nature, we cannot comprehend ; but we can easily comprehend the high and engaging morality of that character of God which is developed in the history of the New Testament. God gave his equal and well-beloved Son, to suffer in the stead of an apostate world ; and through this exhibition of awful justice, he publishes the fullest and freest pardon. He thus teaches us, that it forms no part of his scheme of mercy to dissolve the eternal connexion between sin and misery. No ; this connexion stands sure ; and one of the chief objects of Divine revelation is to convince men of this truth. And Justice does the work of mercy, when

it alarms us to a sense of danger, and stimulates us to flee from a continually-increasing wo. But the cross of Christ does not merely show the danger of sin ; it demonstrates an unwearied compassion—a love unutterable, which extends its invitations and entreaties of reconciliation as wide as the ravages of sin, in order that by such an instance of self-sacrificing solicitude on the part of God for their welfare, men might be allured to the love of Him who had so loved them ; and that their grateful admiration having for its object the full perfections of the Divine character, might gradually carry them forward to an entire resemblance of it.

Most men will have no hesitation to admit the general proposition, that the moral character of God supposes the union of justice and mercy in an infinite degree. Now, the gospel history simply gives an individuality and a life to this general idea, in the same way that the old king's conduct towards his son gave an individuality and a life to the general idea of paternal affection in union with a regard for the laws. Most men will also admit, that the conduct

of this good prince was suited not only to give a distinct view of his own principles, but also to stamp the character of these principles on the heart of his son. But the same causes operate in fitting the conduct of God, as declared in the gospel, for stamping the character of its principles on the hearts of those who believe it. The old king was sensible, that the abstract idea of his justice and affection would have had but very little influence on his son's character ; and therefore it was the part of a wise and benevolent man to embody this abstract idea in a palpable action, which might make an intelligible and powerful appeal to his understanding and his heart. The abstract idea of God's character has still less influence on our minds ; because the invisible infinity of his essence adds incalculably to the natural vagueness and inefficiency of such impressions: It was therefore the part of a wise and benevolent Being to embody his attributes in a train of palpable and intelligible action, which might carry a distinct and influential appeal to our capacities and feelings. If the ultimate object of God's dealings with men

had been to pardon their sins, this might have been done without giving them any information on the subject until they stood before the judgment-seat: But if his gracious object was, as the Bible represents it, to make men partakers of his own happiness, by communicating to them his own moral likeness, it was necessary that such an exhibition of his moral character should be made to them, as might convey to their understandings a distinct idea of it, and might address to their feelings of gratitude and esteem and interest, such appropriate excitements and persuasives as might lead to a full resemblance of it.

SECTION IV.

BUT many who admit the abstract character of God, feel notwithstanding a disposition to reject the gospel history ; although its whole tenor is in perfect conformity with the general idea to which they have professed their consent. This is natural, though unreasonable. It is probable that the old king's son was very much astonished when he learned the final determination as to the mode of executing the law in his case ; yet, if he had been asked before, what his opinion of his father's character was, it is likely that he would have answered with confidence, that he knew him to be a just prince and an affectionate father. Why, then, was he astonished ? Did not the fact agree with his previous judgment ? The only explanation is, that he did not comprehend the full meaning of his own expressions ; and when he saw the general idea which he had formed of his father's character em-

bodied in an action, he did not recognize it to be in fact the same thing. Many of those who reason on the character of God fall into a similar mistake : They admit his absolute moral perfections ; but when the abstract idea which they have formed of Him takes life before their eyes, and assumes the body of an action, they start from it as if it were an utter stranger. And why?—The only reason which can be given is, that the abstract idea which they talk about, is so vague and indeterminate, as to make no distinct impression on their minds.

If a man really admitted, in truth and in intelligence, that abstract idea of God which he admits in words, he would find his reason compelled to believe a fact which is only an exemplification of that idea, nay the existence of which seems in some degree indispensable to the consistency of that idea. The admission of this abstract idea, and the rejection of the corresponding fact, are as inconsistent as to be convinced of the thorough liberality of a friend's character, and at the same time to reject as absurd and fanciful the history of a liberal action,

said to have been performed by him when the occasion seemed actually to require it.

There is another quality belonging to abstract ideas, arising from the vagueness of the impressions made by them, which recommends them to many minds ; and that is, their inoffensiveness. A corrupt politician, for instance, can speculate on and applaud the abstract idea of integrity ; but when this abstract idea takes the form of a man and a course of action, it ceases to be that harmless and welcome visitor it used to be, and draws on itself the decided enmity of its former apparent friend. The fact is, that the man never really loved the abstract idea of integrity, else he must have loved every exemplification of it. We have thus an unequivocal test of a man's principles. Bring the eloquent eulogist of magnanimity into a situation where he may be tried,—bring him in difficult circumstances into contact with a person of real magnanimity,—and we shall see whether it was the thing or the name which he loved.

In the same way, many men will admit the abstract idea of a God of infinite holiness and goodness ; and will even take de-

light in exercising their reason or their taste in speculating on the subject of his being and attributes ; yet these same persons will shrink with dislike and alarm from the living energy which this abstract idea assumes in the Bible. It is there no longer a harmless generality : It is a living Being, asserting one spiritual character and one class of principles in harmony with his own, disapproving and condemning every other, and casting the weight of omnipotence into his scale, to prove the vanity of all resistance. Those who feel oppressed by the vigilance and strictness of this ever-present witness, without being convinced of the importance of his friendship, are glad to retreat and to shroud themselves under the vagueness of an abstract idea. But in truth they do not believe nor love this abstract idea of God, else they would also believe and love the living character which corresponds to it. The real conviction of the truth of the abstract idea would necessarily contain in it the conviction of the corresponding fact.

These remarks may serve to illustrate the grounds on which a charge of moral

guilt is brought by the Scriptures against unbelief. If a man cannot refuse his assent and approbation to an abstract principle in morals, why does he reject it when it loses its abstractness, and comes in a form of power and efficiency? The principle continues the same; it has only assumed a more active attitude. In truth, he now rejects it because it is active, and because it strenuously opposes many of his favourite inclinations. He does not wish to be guided by what he knows to be right, but by what he feels to be agreeable. "He does not wish to retain God in his knowledge." He does not wish, at any risk or with any sacrifice, to do the will of God; and *therefore* "he doth not know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Such an ignorance as this is criminal; because it arises from a wilful stifling of conviction, and an aversion to admitted truths.

It thus appears, that, by the help of abstract ideas and general terms, a man may appear to have made great progress in morals, whilst in fact he has learned nothing. Things operate on our minds exactly according to our apprehension of them, and

not according to their own intrinsic value. Our apprehension of abstract truths in morality is so vague, that they hardly operate on our characters at all. Does it not, then, approach almost to a demonstration, that if God really intended to improve the happiness and characters of men, by instructing them in the excellence of his own character, he would communicate this instruction, not in the form of abstract propositions and general terms, which are, by the construction of the human mind, incapable of producing any real and lasting effect upon us, but by that way which coincides with our faculties of apprehension,—that is, by the way of living and palpable actions, which may add the weight and distinctness of their own substance to those truths which they are intended to develop? That men stand in need of such an improvement, is certain; that a gracious Being should intend it, is surely not improbable; and if he had such an intention, that some such scheme as Christianity should have been adopted, seems necessary to its success.

At first sight, it may seem strange that a system evidently flowing from so much

goodness, tending to so much happiness, and constructed with so much wisdom, should in general be either rejected, or admitted with an inattentive and therefore useless assent : But there are circumstances in the case which abundantly account for this. The Great Author of Christianity anticipated this rejection, and forewarned his disciples of it. His knowledge of the heart of man made him well acquainted with many causes which would operate against the reception of his doctrine. When Agis attempted to regenerate the diseased government of Sparta, he stirred up and armed against himself all the abuses and corruptions of the state. It would have been strange if this had not happened ; and it would also be strange, if a doctrine which tends to regenerate human nature, and to eradicate the deep-seated and yet favourite diseases of the heart, should not arm against itself all those moral evils which it threatens to destroy.

A man finds no difficulty in giving his acquiescence to any proposition which does not carry along with it an obligation on him to something which he dislikes. The

great bulk of the population of this country, for instance, acquiesce in the Copernican system of astronomy, although they may possess little or no knowledge of the mathematical or physical truths on which this system is reared. But let us make the supposition for a moment, that an acquiescence in this theory somehow or other involved in it a moral obligation on every believer of it to walk round the world, we cannot doubt but that the party of Ptolemy, or some other less imperious philosopher, would, in these circumstances, very soon carry almost every voice.

The religion of Jesus Christ involves in it a great variety of obligations ; and it was indeed principally for the purpose of elucidating and enforcing these obligations, that God was pleased to make it known to mankind. And many of these obligations are so distasteful to the natural selfishness or indolence of our hearts, that we feel unwilling to embrace a conviction which involves in it so complete a derangement of our plans, and a thwarting of our habitual inclinations. Were the beautiful lineaments of the Christian character to be portrayed

in a theory which should disclaim all interference with the consciences and duties of the world, it would infallibly attract much intellectual and sentimental admiration: And were the high and holy character of God, and its universally-pervading influence, to be painted in glowing colours, —and were that unbounded liberty to be described, in which those spirits that are perfectly conformed to His will, must expatiate through all the vastness of creation and eternity, —were all this to be couched in the terms of a lofty imagination, without any appeal to the conscience, and without attempting to bring in this splendid vision to haunt our hours of carelessness or of crime, —who can doubt that taste, and fancy, and eloquence, would pour in their converted disciples within the engaging circle of such a religion? And yet we find, that taste, and fancy, and eloquence, and high intellect, and fine sentiment, often reject Christianity: And the reason seems to be, because it is not a science merely, but a practical art, in which every part of knowledge is connected with a corresponding duty. It does not present to us a beautiful

picture merely,—it commands us to copy it; it does not merely hold forth to us the image of perfect virtue,—it declares to us also our own guilt, and denounces our condemnation; it does not merely exhibit to us the sublime idea of a spiritual and universal sovereign,—it also calls upon us, by this very exhibition, under the most awful sanctions of hope and fear, to humble ourselves before Him, and to look to Him as the rightful proprietor of our thoughts and words and actions. There is something in all this very harassing and displeasing to our nature; and the fact that it is so, may account for the real rejection that it generally meets with even amongst its nominal friends, and may also operate as a warning against ascribing too much weight to that contempt or aversion which it sometimes receives from those whose talents, when directed to other objects, we have been accustomed to follow with our admiration and gratitude. The proud man does not like to give up the triumph of superiority; the vain man does not like to give up the real or fancied applause of the circle in which he moves; the careless or worldly

or sensual man does not like to have himself continually watched and scrutinized by a witness who never sleeps, and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Now, as great talents are often to be found in men of such characters, we need not wonder that they employ these talents in defending the foundation on which their chief enjoyment is built, rather than in pursuit of a truth which, they are conscious, would level the whole fabric with the ground. Men do not look very diligently for that which they would be sorry to find.

It is difficult to persuade a careless profligate to live a life of temperate and useful exertion ; because it is difficult to obtain from him a candid hearing on the subject. He thinks exclusively of the gratifications which he is called upon to renounce, and never allows his mind to rest calmly on the motives which would induce him to do so. Whilst he apprehends fully and distinctly the pleasures connected with his own habits, he has a very vague idea of the evils resulting from them, or of the advantages of an opposite course. If the latter apprehension were as vivid as the

former, the man's character would change. And there are arguments, and those of a mere worldly nature, which have often produced this effect. All that is necessary to accomplish it, is a candid attention on his part to the whole truth of the case. There is in his mind, indeed, a natural opposition to the argument; but there is also in the argument a natural destructiveness of his faults; and if it be vividly apprehended and retained, it will gain the victory, and cast out its enemy. The argument, then, must, in the first place, be a sufficient one in itself; that is to say, it must show, that, in reason, the advantage gained by complying with it exceeds the advantage of rejecting it. And, in the second place, this sufficient argument must be distinctly and fully apprehended. The best argument in the world is of no use, unless it be properly understood, and the motives which it holds forth be vividly apprehended. To a mind that does not distinctly comprehend the subject, a good argument will appear bad, and a bad one may appear good. We account, in this way, for the different success which the same argu-

ment meets with when it is addressed to a number of individuals. Some are moved by it—others are not ; that is to say, some fully apprehend it—others do not. And this may arise either from their misunderstanding the terms of the argument, or from their unwillingness to admit a principle which interferes with their own inclinations.

Thus it fares often with human arguments ; nor do the arguments of God escape a similar fate. We have already seen how the spirituality of the Christian requirements naturally excites an unwillingness to admit its principles. This unwillingness can only be overcome by a full view of its glorious inducements. But, unfortunately, this view is often intercepted and obscured by various causes, and by none more than the usual way in which religion is studied.

Most people in this country, and probably even the majority of the population in Europe, think that they understand Christianity ; and yet a very small proportion of them have read the Bible with that degree of ordinary attention which

they bestow on the common concerns of life. Their ideas on this subject are derived almost entirely from creeds and church articles, or human compositions of some kind. The evil consequences arising from this are most grievous. To convince ourselves that they are indeed so to a high degree, we have only to compare the two methods.

In the Bible, we uniformly find the doctrines—even those that are generally considered most abstruse—pressed upon us as demonstrations or evidences of some important moral feature of the Divine mind, and as motives tending to produce in us some corresponding disposition in relation to God or man. This is perfectly reasonable. Our characters cannot but be in some degree affected, by what we believe to be the conduct and the will of the Almighty towards ourselves and the rest of our species. The history of this conduct, and this will, constitutes what are called the Christian doctrines. If, then, the disposition, or character which we are urged to acquire, recommend itself to our reasons and consciences as right and agreeable to

the will of God, we cannot but approve that precept as morally true; and if the doctrine by which it is enforced carries in it a distinct and natural tendency to produce this disposition or character, then we feel ourselves compelled to admit that there is at least *a moral truth* in this doctrine. And if we find that the doctrine has not only this purely moral tendency, but that it is also most singularly adapted to assert and acquire a powerful influence over those principles in our nature to which it directs its appeal, then we must also pronounce that there is a natural truth in the doctrine,—or, in other words, that however contradictory it may be to human practice, it has however a natural consistency with the regulating principles of the human mind. And farther, if the doctrine be not only true in morals and in its natural adaptation to the mind of man, but if the fact which it records coincides also and harmonizes with that general idea of the Divine character which reason forms from the suggestions of conscience, and from an observation of the works and ways of God in the external world, then we are bound to

acknowledge that this doctrine appears to be true in its relation to God. In the Bible, the Christian doctrines are always stated in this connexion : They stand as indications of the character of God, and as the exciting motives of a corresponding character in man. Forming thus the connecting link between the character of the Creator and the creature, they possess a majesty which it is impossible to despise, and exhibit a form of consistency and truth which it is difficult to disbelieve. Such is Christianity in the Bible ; but in creeds and church articles it is far otherwise. These tests and summaries originated from the introduction of doctrinal errors and metaphysical speculations into religion ; and, in consequence of this, they are not so much intended to be the repositories of truth, as barriers against the encroachment of erroneous opinions. The doctrines contained in them therefore are not stated with any reference to their great object in the Bible, — the regeneration of the human heart, by the knowledge of the Divine character. They appear as detached propositions, indicating no moral cause, and point-

ing to no moral effect. They do not look to God, on the one hand, as their source ; nor to man, on the other, as the object of their moral urgency. They appear like links severed from the chain to which they belonged ; and thus they lose all that evidence which arises from their consistency, and all that dignity which is connected with their high design. I do not talk of the propriety or impropriety of having church articles, but the evils which spring from receiving impressions of religion exclusively or chiefly from this source.

I may instance the ordinary statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, as an illustration of what I mean. It seems difficult to conceive that any man should read through the New Testament candidly and attentively, without being convinced that this doctrine is essential to and implied in every part of the system : But it is not so difficult to conceive, that although his mind is perfectly satisfied on this point, he may yet, if his religious knowledge is exclusively derived from the Bible, feel a little surprised and staggered, when he for the first time reads the terms in which it is announ-

ced in the articles and confessions of all Protestant churches. In these summaries, the doctrine in question is stated by itself, divested of all its scriptural accompaniments ; and is made to bear simply on the nature of the Divine essence, and the mysterious fact of the existence of Three in One. It is evident that this fact, taken by itself, cannot in the smallest degree tend to develope the Divine character, and therefore cannot make any moral impression on our minds.

In the Bible, it assumes quite a different shape ; it is there subservient to the manifestation of the moral character of God. The doctrine of God's combined justice and mercy in the redemption of sinners, and of his continued spiritual watchfulness over the progress of truth through the world, and in each particular heart, could not have been communicated without it, so as to have been distinctly and vividly apprehended ; but it is never mentioned except in connexion with these objects ; nor is it ever taught as a separate subject of belief. There is a great and important difference between these two modes

of statement. In the first, the doctrine stands as an isolated fact of a strange and unintelligible nature, and is apt even to suggest the idea that Christianity holds out a premium for believing improbabilities. In the other, it stands indissolubly united with an act of Divine holiness and compassion, which radiates to the heart an appeal of tenderness most intelligible in its nature and object, and most constraining in its influence.

The abstract fact that there is a plurality in the unity of the Godhead, really makes no address either to our understandings, or our feelings, or our consciences. But the obscurity of the doctrine, as far as moral purposes are concerned, is dispelled, when it comes in such a form as this,—“God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” Or this,—“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.” Our metaphysical ignorance of the Divine essence is not indeed in the slightest degree removed by

this mode of stating the subject ; but our moral ignorance of the Divine character is enlightened ; and that is the thing with which we have to do. We love or hate our fellow-creatures—we are attracted to or repelled from them—in consequence of our acquaintance with their moral characters ; and we do not find ourselves barred from the exercise of these feelings, because the anatomical structure of their frames is unknown to us, or because the mysterious link which binds the soul to the body has baffled all investigation. The knowledge communicated by revelation is a moral knowledge, and it has been communicated in order to produce a moral effect upon our characters ; and a knowledge of the Divine essence would have as little bearing upon this object, as far as we can see, as a knowledge of the elementary essence of matter.

I shall give one example more of the mode in which the truth of God has been perverted by passing through the hands of men. The doctrine of the atonement through Jesus Christ, which is the cornerstone of Christianity, and to which all the other doctrines of revelation are subservient,

has had to encounter the misapprehension of the understanding as well as the pride of the heart. This pride is natural to man, and can only be overcome by the power of the truth; but the misapprehension might be removed by the simple process of reading the Bible with attention; because it has arisen from neglecting the record itself, and taking our information from the discourses or the systems of men who have engrafted the metaphysical subtleties of the schools upon the unperplexed statement of the word of God. In order to understand the facts of revelation, we *must* form a system to ourselves; but if any subtlety, of which the application is unintelligible to common sense, or uninfluential on conduct, enters into our system, we may be sure that it is a wrong one. The common-sense system of a religion consists in two connexions, — first, the connexion between the doctrines and the character of God which they exhibit; and secondly, the connexion between these same doctrines and the character which they are intended to impress on the mind of man. When, therefore, we are considering a religious doctrine, our ques-

tions ought to be, first, What view does this doctrine give of the character of God, in relation to sinners? And secondly, What influence is the belief of it calculated to exercise on the character of man? Though I state the questions separately, my observations on them cannot properly be kept entirely distinct. The first of these questions leads us to consider the atonement as an act necessarily resulting from and simply developing principles in the Divine mind, altogether independent of its effects on the hearts of those who are interested in it. The second leads us to consider the adaptation of the history of the atonement, when believed, to the moral wants and capacities of the human mind. This last consideration really embraces the former; because it is only by the impressions produced on our minds by any being whatever, that we can judge of the qualities of that being. And the impressions produced by the atonement are referable to its adaptation to the human mind. There is something very striking and wonderful in this adaptation; and the deeper we search into it, the stronger reasons shall we discover for admiration and gratitude, and the more thoroughly shall we

be convinced that it is not a lucky coincidence, nor an adjustment contrived by the precarious and temporizing wisdom of this world, but that it is stamped with the uncounterfeited seal of the universal Ruler, and carries on it the traces of that same mighty will, which has connected the sun with his planetary train, and fixed the great relations in nature, appointing to each atom its bound that it cannot pass. Yet it must be remembered that this adaptation is only an evidence for the truth of the gospel, but that it does not constitute the gospel. The gospel consists in the proclamation of mercy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the only true source of sanctity and peace and hope,—and if, instead of drinking from this fountain, we busy ourselves in tracing the course of the streams that flow from it, and in admiring the beauty and fertility of the country through which they run, we may indeed have a tasteful and sentimental relish for the organization of Christianity, but it will not be in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Before we admit the truth of a doctrine like the atonement, it is proper to contemplate it in all its consequences ; but after we have admit-

ted it, we ought to give the first place in our thoughts to the doctrine itself, because our minds are usefully operated on, not by the thought of the consequences, but by the contemplation of the doctrine. When an act of kindness has been done to us, our gratitude is excited by contemplating the kindness itself, not by investigating that law in our nature by which gratitude naturally is produced by kindness. It is of great importance to remember this. We do not and cannot become Christians by thinking of the Christian character, nor even by thinking of the adaptation of the Christian doctrines to produce that character, but by having our hearts impressed and imbued by the doctrines themselves. The doctrines are constituent parts of God's character and government, and they are revealed to us that we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds by the knowledge of them.

The doctrine of the atonement is the great subject of revelation. God is represented as delighting in it, as being glorified by it, and as being most fully manifested by it. All the other doctrines radiate from this as their centre. In subservience to it, the distinction in the unity

of the Godhead has been revealed. It is described as the everlasting theme of praise and song amongst the blessed who surround the throne of God. It is represented in language suitable to our capacities, as calling forth all the energies of omnipotence. And indeed when we come to consider what this great work was, we shall not wonder that even the inspired heralds of salvation faltered in the utterance of it. The human race had fallen off from their allegiance, they had turned away from God, their hearts chose what God abhorred, and despised what God honoured: They were the enemies of God, they had broken his law, which their own consciences acknowledged to be holy, just, and gracious, and had thus most righteously incurred the penalty denounced against sin. Man had thus ruined himself, and the faithfulness of God seemed bound to make this ruin irretrievable.

The design of the atonement was to make mercy towards this offcast race consistent with the honour and the holiness of the Divine government. To accomplish this gracious purpose, the Eternal Word, who was God, took on himself the nature of man,

and as the elder brother and representative and champion of the guilty family, he solemnly acknowledged the justice of the sentence pronounced against sin, and submitted himself to its full weight of wo, in the stead of his adopted kindred. God's justice found rest here; his law was magnified and made honourable. The human nature of the Saviour gave him a brother's right and interest in the human race, whilst his divine nature made his sacrifice available, and invested the law, under which he had bowed himself, with a glory beyond what could have accrued to it from the penal extinction of a universe. The two books of the Bible in which this subject is most minutely and methodically argued, viz. the epistles to the Romans and the Hebrews, commence with asserting most emphatically both the perfect divinity and the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. On this basis the reasoning is founded which demonstrates the universal sufficiency and the suitability of the death of Christ as an atonement for the sins of men, or as a vindication of the justice of the Divine government in dispensing mercy to the guilty. What a wonderful and awful and enliven-

ing subject of contemplation this is ! God *so* loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life. And the same God, that he might declare his abhorrence of sin in the very form and substance of his plan of mercy, sent forth this Son to make a propitiation *through his blood*. This is the God with whom we have to do. This is his character, the Just God and yet the Saviour. There is an augustness and a tenderness about this act, a depth and heighth and breadth and length of moral worth and sanctity, which defies equally the full grasp of thought and of language ; but we can understand something of it, and therefore has it been revealed to us. But does it not mark in most fearful contrast, the difference which exists between the mind of God and the mind of man ? Whilst man is making a mock at sin, God descends from the throne of glory, and takes on him the frailty of a creature, and dies as a creature the representative of sinners, before his holy nature can pronounce sin forgiven. It was to remove this difference that these glad-tidings have been preached ; and he that believes this history of

God, shall be like him, for in it he sees God as he is. In this wonderful transaction, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. It was planned and executed, in order that God might be just whilst he justified the believer in Jesus. It proclaims glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and good-will to man. The new and divinely constituted Head of the human family has been raised from the dead, his sacrifice has been judicially accepted, and he has been crowned with immortality in his representative character. This is the foundation on which sinners are invited to rest the interests of their souls for eternity. It is held up for their most scrutinizing inspection, and they are urged to draw near and examine whether it be sufficient to bear their weight. They are asked, as it were, if they can discover a flaw in the fulness and sincerity and efficiency of that love which could prompt God to veil his majesty, and ally himself with our polluted race; and assume an elder brother's interest in our welfare, and magnify the law which we had broken, by suffering its penalty in our

room, and thus connect the Divine glory with the salvation of sinners. They are assured on the authority of God, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, and that there is no condemnation to those who believe on him. They have thus the declaration of God, and the act of God, still more impressive and persuasive than his declaration, to engage their confidence, and to banish all doubts and suspicions from their breasts. As the Saviour expired on the cross, he said, "It is finished." The work of expiation was then accomplished: and the history of that work comes forth in the form of a general address to the sons of men, "Return unto me, for I have redeemed you;" "Be ye reconciled to God." This is the fountain of the river of life, and over it are these words written, "Ho, every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters." It proclaims pardon for sin; it is therefore quite suited for sinners. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; he came to seek and to save that which was lost. He said this himself, and he said it whilst every possible variety and aggravation of guilt stood full in the view

of his omniscience. He said it whilst he was contemplating that cup of bitterness and amazement and death which he had engaged to drink, and which was mixed for him to this very end, that the chief of sinners might be welcomed to the water of life. What is that weight of guilt which can exclude from mercy? The very thought is degrading to the dignity of the sacrifice, and injurious to the holy love which appointed it, and to the unstained truth which has pronounced its all-sufficiency. Can we wonder, then, at the high-toned triumph which filled the soul of the Apostle Paul as he gazed on this glorious object, and saw in it the pledge that his sins, which were many, were forgiven him, and that the heart of his often outraged Master yearned upon him, and that his own lot for eternity was bound up with the glorious eternity of his God? “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

But if the virtue and sufficiency of the

atonement be thus universal, why are not the benefits of it universally enjoyed? Had the mere removal of an impending penalty, in consistency with justice, constituted the whole and the ultimate object of God in this great work, there would probably have been no difference nor individual peculiarity with respect to these benefits, nor should we have had such admonitions addressed to us as the following: “Many are called, but few are chosen;” “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;” “do all diligence to make your calling and election sure.” But Christ gave himself for us, not only to redeem us from the punishment due to iniquity, but also that he might purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. The subjects of his kingdom were to be those in whose hearts *the truth* dwelt, the great truth relating to the character of God. This truth was developed and exhibited in the atonement,—its bright rays were concentrated there; and therefore the intelligent belief of the atonement, was the most proper channel through which this divine light might enter the soul of man. It is this light alone which can chase

away the shades of moral darkness, and restore life and spiritual vigour to the numbed and bewildered faculties. And therefore the benefits of the atonement are connected with a belief of the atonement. “He that believeth shall be saved : he that believeth not shall be condemned.” When the identity of unhappiness and moral darkness in an intelligent subject of God’s government is fully understood, this connexion between belief and salvation, will appear to be not the appointment of a new enactment, but merely the renewed declaration of an established and necessary constitution. The truth concerning God’s character is an immortal and glorious principle, developed and laid up in Jesus Christ ; and God imparts its immortality and glory to the spirits in which it dwells. This truth cannot dwell in us, except in so far as the work of Christ remains as a reality in our minds. We cannot enjoy the spiritual life and peace of the atonement, separated from the believing remembrance of the atonement, as we cannot enjoy the light of the sun separated from the presence of the sun. It would be a foolish madness to think of

locking in the light by shutting our case-ments ; and it is no less foolish to dream of appropriating the peace of the gospel, whilst the great truth of the gospel is not in the eye of faith. In the Epistle to the Galatians, Vth. 25th, St. Paul says, if ye have your life from the gospel, (here called the Spirit), see that you walk in, i. e. keep close to, the gospel. When our hearts stray from the truth, we stray from that life which is contained in the truth. We cannot long continue to retain any moral impression on our minds separate from the object which is fitted to produce the impression.

The man who sees in the atonement, a deliverance from ruin, and a pledge of immortal bliss, will rejoice in it, and in all the principles which it develops. “ Let not the wise man,” says the prophet, “ glory or rejoice in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man rejoice in his might, let not the rich man rejoice in his riches ; but let him that rejoiceth, rejoice in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth ;

for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." He therefore who rejoices in the atonement, rejoices in that which delights the heart of God; for here have his loving kindness, and his judgment, and his righteousness, been most fully and most gloriously exercised. It is thus that the believer has communion with God through Jesus Christ, and it is thus that he becomes conformed to his moral likeness. The same truth which gives peace, produces also holiness. What a view does the cross of Christ give of the depravity of man, and of the guilt of sin! And must not the abhorrence of it be increased tenfold, by the consideration that it has been committed against the God of all grace and of all consolation? A sense of our interest would keep us close to that Saviour, in whom our life is treasured up, if we needed such a motive to bind us to a benefactor who chose to bear the wrath of Omnipotence rather than that we should bear it. Shall we frustrate the designs of love by our own undoing, and trample on that sacred blood which was shed for us? No; if we believe in the atonement, we must love him who

made the atonement ; and if we love him, we shall enter into his views, we shall feel for the honour of God, we shall feel for the souls of men, we shall loathe sin especially in our own hearts, we shall look forward with an earnestness of expectation to the period when the mystery of God shall be finished, and the spiritual temple completed, and the Redeemer's triumph fulfilled. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul sure and stedfast ; it is fixed within the vail ; it looks to the atonement ; and whatever be the afflictions or the trials of life, it can still rejoice in that voice which whispers from the inner sanctuary, " Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid ;" it can still feel the force of that reasoning, " He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely also give us all things ?" This hope maketh not ashamed, it will not and cannot disappoint, because it is founded on the character of that God who changeth not.

It is thus that the faith of the gospel produces that revolution in the mind, which is called in Scripture conversion, or the new birth. A man naturally trusts to some-

thing within himself, to his prudence, or to his good fortune, or to his worth, or to his acquirements, or to what he has done well, or to his unfeigned sorrow for what he has done ill ; self, in one form or other more or less amiable, is the foundation of his hope, and by necessary consequence, self is ever present to his view, and becomes the ultimate object of his conduct, and the director and the former of his character. But when he believes and understands the truth of God as manifested in the atonement, to be the only foundation on which he can rest with safety, the only refuge from that ruin into which he has been led by the guidance of self, he will cast from him these perishing and fluctuating delusions, and he will repose his interests for time and for eternity on the love of him who bled for him, and on the faithfulness of him who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent ; and resting thus on the character of God as the exclusive ground of his confidence, he will contemplate it as his ultimate object, he will cleave to it as his counsellor and his guide, and will thus be gradually moulded

into its likeness. This foundation of hope continues the same through every stage of the Christian's progress. Though his growth in personal sanctity be the grand and blessed result of his faith, yet that sanctity can never become the ground of his confidence without throwing him back upon self, and separating him from God, and cutting off his supply from the living fountain of holiness, and thus unsanctifying him. But although personal sanctity can never become the foundation of hope, yet it will much strengthen our confidence in that foundation ; just as returning health strengthens the confidence of the patient in that medicine which he feels restoring him.

It is a law of our moral constitution, that the foundation of our confidence becomes necessarily the mould of our characters. The principles developed in the atonement, are an assemblage of all that is lovely and noble and admirable in spiritual excellence. He, then, that truly and exclusively rests his hope on the atonement, becomes a partaker of the character of God. The great argument for the truth of Christianity lies in the sanctifying influence of its doctrines ;

and, alas ! the great argument against it, lies in the unsanctified lives of its professors. A false exhibition of Christianity is thus more pernicious and more hateful than professed infidelity. But false pretences are not confined to religion ; and that man is indeed a fool who throws away his soul because another man is a hypocrite. The gospel claims and deserves an examination on its own merits, and well will it repay the candid examiner. It warns of a danger, the reality of which is inseparably connected with the admitted holiness of God, and the admitted sinfulness of man ; it discovers a refuge from this danger, which most beautifully harmonizes with all the Divine perfections ; and when that refuge is narrowly considered, it is found not only to be a place of safety, but to be the entrance into a holy and blessed and glorious immortality. Like the Upas tree, it invites the weary and heavy laden to its shelter ; but, unlike the Upas tree, it dispels their languor, and restores their fainting spirits, and gives a new and a vigorous and an enlivening impulse to every organ of their debilitated frames ; its leaves are for

the healing of the nations, and its fruit is the bread of life.

Let us now return to the questions with which we commenced these observations; viz. What view does this doctrine give of the character of God? and What influence is the belief of it fitted to exercise on the character of man? and let us, from the statement which has been given, draw out the answers. Love surpassing thought is certainly the prominent feature of that glorious character which is exhibited to us in the atonement;—but it is a love in perfect consistency with a holiness which cannot look upon iniquity,—it is the love of the almighty God, who has not exerted his omnipotence in silencing or overstepping the claims of justice, but in meeting them and fulfilling them. It is a love—which sits enthroned on that mercy-seat which rests on eternal truth,—and whose very nature it is to hate all evil. The effect upon the character of man, produced by the belief of it, will be to love Him who first loved us, and to put the fullest confidence in his goodness and willingness to forgive—to associate sin with the ideas both of the deepest

misery and the basest ingratitude—to admire the unsearchable wisdom and the high principle which have combined the fullest mercy with the most uncompromising justice—and to love all our fellow-creatures from the consideration that our common Father has taken such an interest in their welfare, and from the thought, that as we have been all shipwrecked in the same sea by the same wide-wasting tempest, so we are all invited by the same gracious voice to take refuge in the same haven of eternal rest.

It might seem scarcely possible that this simple doctrine should be misapprehended; and yet, from the unaccountable and most unfortunate propensity to look for religious information any where rather than in the Bible, it has been perverted in a variety of ways according to the tempers of those who have speculated on it. It has been sometimes so incautiously stated, as to give ground to cavillers for the charge that the Christian scheme represents God's attribute of justice as utterly at variance with every moral principle. The allegation has assumed a form somewhat resembling this, "that, according to Christianity, God in-

deed apports to every instance and degree of transgression its proper punishment; but that, while he rigidly exacts this punishment, he is not much concerned whether the person who pays it be the real criminal or an innocent being, provided only that it is a full equivalent; nay, that he is under a strange necessity to cancel guilt whenever this equivalent of punishment is tendered to him by whatever hand. This perversion has arisen from the habit amongst some writers on religion of pressing too far the analogy between a crime and a pecuniary debt. It is not surprising, that any one who entertains such a view of the subject, should reject Christianity as a revelation of the God of holiness and goodness. But this is not the view given in the Bible. The account which the Bible gives of the matter is this, "Herein is love,—not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins;" and God set forth Jesus Christ, "to declare his righteousness." Any view of the doctrine which is inconsistent with this account, is a perversion of Scripture, for which the

perverters are themselves responsible, and not the Bible. The error consists in separating the actions of God from the intention manifested in them towards men. Were such a view, however, of the Divine Being, as that which has been just mentioned, actually and fully believed by any man of an ordinary construction of mind, it would assuredly produce very strange and very melancholy results. He would learn from it to consider the connexion between sin and misery, not as a necessary connexion, but as an arbitrary one, which might be dissolved, and had been dissolved by the authority of mere power. Thus he could not identify in his thoughts and feelings misery with sin,—which is one of the prominent lessons of the Bible. He could see nothing in the character of God either venerable or lovely. And even the restraint of fear would be removed by the idea, that a penalty had been already paid of greater price than any debt of crime which he had contracted, or could contract. His heart could find in this doctrine no constraining power urging him to the fulfilment of the great commandments of love to God and

man. In fact, this doctrine undermines the divinity of Christ as much as Socinianism, inasmuch as it makes a separation between the views and character of the Father and those of the Son.

There is another view of this doctrine, which, though less revolting to the feelings than that which I have just stated, is quite as inconsistent with reason. According to it, the atonement is a scheme by which God has mitigated the strict purity of his law ; so that those who live under the gospel are merely required to yield an imperfect but sincere obedience, instead of that perfect obedience to which they were bound before they professed the faith of Christ. Now, let it be remembered, that the love of God *with all the heart* constitutes the substance of the law which we are called on to obey ; and let it also be remembered, that the sacrifice of Christ was made not only as a vindication of God's justice in proclaiming pardon to the guilty, but also for the purpose of presenting to the human heart, an object most worthy, and most admirably fitted to attract all its love ; and then it will appear, that those who give this inter-

pretation of the doctrine, do in fact maintain, that God dispenses with our giving him our full love, on condition *that we are convinced that he deserves this full love at our hands.* The whole end and scope of religion is lost sight of in this interpretation. *Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* A perfect conformity to the will of God, is not only perfect obedience—it is also perfect happiness; and that gracious Father who calls on his creatures to be holy as he is holy, calls on them, by the very same exhortation, to be happy as he is happy. To dispense with our obedience, is not mercy to us; for it is in truth to dispense with our happiness. We are not received into the favour of God at all on the ground of our own deservings, but on the ground of the satisfaction made to Divine justice by the death of Christ as the representative of sinners; and the belief of this mercy, by its natural operation, gradually subdues the heart to the love and the obedience of God. Perfect obedience, then, though it is required, and though it is in-

dispensable to perfect happiness, is not the foundation of our hope for eternity: It is the object of our hope, not the foundation of it. We must be trained up to it by the faith of the gospel. It is never attained here in its blessed fulness; and therefore perfect happiness is never attained: But the seed of it may be attained, and may take root in the heart; and it has an eternity before it, to grow and flourish in. An imperfect but sincere obedience, will almost always mean in the human judgment, that degree of obedience which it is convenient to pay;—and this degree is paid by all men. The real glory of Christianity is thus extinguished, because the standard of moral duty is lowered. True humility can have no place in this system, because we limit our duty by our performance. And gratitude for undeserved mercy is excluded, except that base gratitude which thanks God for permitting us to be unholy. God's mercy is a holy mercy: It pardons, but never sanctions imperfection.

There is another view of this subject, certainly not very uncommon amongst those

who call themselves Christians, which is as subversive of the principle and efficiency of the gospel as either of those mentioned above. According to this scheme, it is supposed that our hope before God rests on a ground made up partly of our own obedience, and partly of the atoning efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. The work of the Saviour is thus made a supplement to the deficiencies of human merit; and this supplement is conceived to be added as a sort of reward for diligent obedience. The decent and orderly, and well-behaved member of society, is thus considered to have a just though an undefined claim to a participation in the benefits of the Redeemer's death, whilst the utterly abandoned and profligate is considered unworthy, in his present state, of approaching the cross of Christ, and is therefore recommended to reform, that he may bring himself into a condition which may entitle him to do this with a reasonable hope of acceptance. There is a looseness and a vagueness generally attached to the ideas of that class of nominal believers to which I refer, that makes it difficult to meet or to answer their theories :

but I am sure that I may confidently appeal to many, whether the statement which has been given, does not bear a very near resemblance to some views of the doctrine of the atonement with which they are well acquainted.

The proper answer to these views, when held by one who really assents to the inspiration of the Bible, is, that they are at direct variance with the Bible. Paul says that justification is declared to be of faith, for this very reason, that it might be *gratuitous*, and that all boasting on the part of man might be excluded, &c. ; “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but of his mercy he saved us.” And when the Jews, who seemed to have prejudices closely allied to those which we are examining, reproached Christ as the friend of publicans and sinners, he answered them, that his business was with sinners ; “that the whole needed not a physician, but they that were sick,” and “that he came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

According to the revealed record, then, that combination of justice and of mercy which was manifested on the cross, is the

exclusive ground of hope before God, — and on this ground every one is invited to rest, in the character of a lost sinner, without delay, and without any fruitless and presumptuous attempts to attain a previous worthiness.

It may appear to some, that this is a question rather about words than things ; but, in fact, it goes to the very root of the Christian character. Is it not evident, that upon this system there can be no true humility ? because, as we know that that portion of our hope which rests upon Christ is already fixed, and therefore not liable to change, our attention is naturally and necessarily drawn almost entirely to the remaining portion, which is to be made out by ourselves, and which is therefore liable to be changed. Our own doings and deservings become thus the chief objects of our thought. And, let me ask, what are the moral impressions which such objects are fitted to make on the character ? If falsely viewed as really worthy titles to the favour of God, they can produce no impressions but those of self-conceit and self-confidence ; and if rightly and truly apprecia-

ted, they can produce nothing but apprehension or despair. The beauty of the Christian revelation consists in this, that the same object which gives peace to the conscience, produces contrition of heart, and is also the most powerful stimulant to holy and grateful obedience. The work of Christ is the sole ground of hope, and is therefore the chief object of thought; and the impressions emanating from this object sum up the Christian character. If I might venture, on such a subject, to allude to the profane mythology of Greece, I think that an illustration of this might be drawn from the fabled contest between Hercules and Antæus. Antæus was the son of the earth, and whenever he touched the earth, fresh vigour was communicated to him. Those blows therefore which he sustained from his adversary, and which in other circumstances would have destroyed him, were to him the means of increasing his strength, because they brought him into nearer contact with the earth, which was the source of his strength. The ground on which he rested was the stimulus of his exertions. When the Christian has apprehensions for his

safety, he looks to the ground of his hope, and there he finds not only peace but vigour.

But the whole of this erroneous view of the doctrine rests on a false notion with regard to the purpose of the gospel. The gospel addresses men as rebels diseased by sin, and already condemned. The salvation which it offers is most strikingly explained by the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xxxi. 31, and three following verses. It consists in a spiritual character: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;" and the mighty instrument by which this effect is to be accomplished is pointed out in the end of the 34th verse, "*for* I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." That is, the circumstances and the manner in which this pardon is to be proclaimed, shall attract the hearts of men to the love and the obedience of God. Salvation, then, means the holy love of God,—a holy obedience of heart, arising from a belief of that mercy which is proclaimed in the gospel. Salvation and obedience mean precisely the same thing; and it is as absurd to say that a

man is saved by obedience, as to say, that a man is restored to health by getting well. We are not called on to obey, in order to obtain pardon ; but we are called on to believe the proclamation of pardon, in order that we may obey. “ The gospel is said to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ;” and why ? “ Because God’s method of justification is revealed in it to be by faith.” Rom. i. 16, 17. I do believe that many preach a different doctrine, from a notion that the true gospel offer of free unconditional pardon is unfavourable to practical obedience and holiness. But, in fact, there is nothing acknowledged by the Bible to be obedience or holiness which does not spring from the belief of this free, undeserved mercy. The attempt at obedience without this, is a most thankless labour,—it is never successful—and even were it successful, it would be the obedience of the hand and not of the heart. It is as if we chose to move the index of a clock with the finger, instead of winding it up. The language of the gospel is, “ You shall be ashamed and confounded, because I am pacified towards you for all your ini-

quities." This plan of pacification wrought out by God himself, is the great subject of the Bible; and the proclamation of this free pardon is the preaching of the gospel; and he who, in his system of teaching, does not hold this up in its proper pre-eminence, is not a preacher of the gospel of Christ. He lays aside that weapon of ethereal temper which God has chosen out of the armoury of heaven, and which he blessed and sanctified for the destruction of moral evil, and goes forth to encounter the powers of darkness without a single well-grounded hope of success. And I am confident—that this same doctrine of free grace, if it could be candidly viewed as a mere abstract question in moral science, would compel the approbation of a true philosopher,—and that the compromise or mutilation of it (which is less uncommon than the value of souls would lead us to desire) is not more opposed to the authority of the word of God, than it is to the principles of sound reason.

This subject has been already illustrated by examples drawn from human life. I shall now therefore vary the view of it, by

considering it in connexion with the rite of sacrifice.

The same truth with regard to the character of God and the condition of man, which is so fully developed in the New Testament, is exhibited also in the Old through an obscurer medium,—a medium of types and shadows and prophecy. When the Messiah was promised to our First Parents, the memory and the principle of the promise were embodied in the institution of sacrifice. Sensible objects were necessary; in order to recal to the thoughts, and to explain to the understanding of man, the spiritual declarations of God. Under the Jewish economy; this institution was enlarged and diversified; but still it pointed to the same *fact*, and illustrated the same *principle*. The *fact* was, the death of Christ for the sins of the world; the *principle* was, that God is at once just and merciful, and that these attributes of his nature are in joint and harmonious operation. Multitudes, probably both of the Jews and of those who lived before the Mosaic system, recognized in their sacrifices that future salvation which was to be wrought

out by the promised seed ; but a far greater number must be supposed to have stopped short at the rite, through want of spiritual discernment. When the prefigured *fact* was thus forgotten, let us consider whether the moral *principle* exhibited in the ceremony might not still in some measure be understood, and affect the character of the devout worshipper. The full vindication of God's holiness, and of the truth of his denunciations against sin, could indeed rest only on the sacrifice of the Divine Saviour ; but although those who saw this great thing through the types which partially obscured whilst they represented it, could alone receive the full benefits of the institution, shall we think that those who did not enter into the spirit of prophecy, were entirely excluded from the operation of its principle, and saw nothing of the Divine character manifested in it ? As the prosecution of this inquiry may tend to throw greater light on some views which have been already given, I shall here consider the subject of sacrifice apart altogether from its prophetic import. This view of the matter simply regards those particulars

which rendered the rite of sacrifice a fit emblem of the atonement of Christ. When God teaches by emblems, he chuses such emblems as are naturally calculated to impress the principle of the antitype upon our minds. There is then a suitableness in animal sacrifices, to give some idea of that great truth which was so gloriously developed in the work of the Saviour, when the fulness of time had arrived. Let us consider, then, wherein consists this suitableness. What is the meaning of a sacrifice? What is the purpose of killing a poor animal, because a man has sinned? Can it be supposed that a wise and good God will in reality make a transference of the guilt of the man to the head of the beast?—Impossible: and it is equally impossible to conceive that God should command his creatures to do a thing which they could not understand, and by which therefore their characters could not be benefited. The institution contained a great truth, exhibiting God's character, and affecting man's. The suppliant who came with his sacrifice before God, virtually said, "Thou hast appointed this rite as the form through

which thy mercy is declared to sinners ; and it is indeed in thy mercy alone that I can hope, for I have deserved this death which I now inflict, as the just reward of my transgressions." Thus the mercy and the holiness of God were both kept in view by this rite ; and gratitude and penitence would be impressed to a certain degree on the characters of those whose hearts accompanied their hands in the service. This is just an exhibition of the principle in natural religion, that God is gracious, and worthy of our highest love ; and that sin deserves punishment, and is connected with misery. Our gratitude, however, for forgiveness would be just in proportion to our apprehensions of the demerit of sin and the danger connected with it, and also to our idea of the interest which God took in our welfare. The death of an animal was the only measure of the guilt and danger of sin, which these sacrifices exhibited ; and forgiveness, which seems an easy thing where there is nothing to fear from the power of the offender, was the only measure of the interest which God had taken in our welfare. Thus, these sacrifices rather in-

culcated on the worshippers the danger and demerit of sin, (and this in no very high degree), than the goodness of God. The animal which was slain was the property of the suppliant; and he might feel the loss of it to be a species of atoning penalty, as well as a typical representation of the guilt of sin, which would very much diminish his idea both of God's free mercy, and of the guilt of sin which could be so easily atoned. The sacrifice of a man would have furnished a greater measure of guilt; but it could not have impressed on the mind any stronger conviction of the graciousness of God. If we ascend the scale of being, and suppose an incarnate angel to become the victim, the measure by which we may estimate the guilt of sin encreases, to be sure, in a very high degree; but still, there is nothing in such a sacrifice which speaks in unequivocal language of the exceeding goodness of God. Although the sufferings of the angel were considered to be perfectly voluntary, it would not alter the view of God's character: Our gratitude would indeed be called forth by the goodness of the angel; but forgiveness still would

seem a cheap and easy thing on the part of God, whose creative fiat could call into existence millions of brighter spirits. That God in human nature should himself become the victim, is a scheme which indeed outstrips all anticipation, and baffles the utmost stretch of our minds when we labour to form an idea of perfect benevolence and perfect holiness; but yet it is the only scheme which can fully meet the double object of strongly attracting our love to God, and at the same time of deeply convincing us of the danger and baseness and ingratitude of sin. This gives us a measure by which we may estimate both the Divine goodness and our own guilt. It is indeed an exhibition of "love which passeth knowledge." But yet, when the conscience comes to be fully enlightened, nothing short of this marvellous exhibition can produce peace. When a man is once thoroughly convinced that sin consists in a choice of the heart different from the will of God, even although that choice does not vent itself in an external action, he must feel that he has accumulated, through the past days of his life, and that

he is still daily accumulating, a most fearful weight of guilt. A day of retribution approaches, and he must meet God face to face. A simple declaration of forgiveness on the part of God, would certainly in these circumstances be most comforting to him; but still it would be difficult to persuade him, that the Holy One who inhabiteth eternity, could look with kindness on a being so polluted and so opposite in every respect to himself in moral character. Until this persuasion takes hold of his mind, he can neither enjoy real peace, nor be animated with that grateful love which can alone lead to a more perfect obedience. The surpassing kindness and tenderness demonstrated in the cross of Christ, and the full satisfaction there rendered to his violated law, when understood and believed, must sweep away all doubts and fears with regard to God's disposition towards him, and must awaken in his heart that sentiment of grateful and reverential attachment which is the spiritual seed of the heavenly inheritance. "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being

reconciled, we shall be saved by his living love."

It seems to me, that the Scriptural statement of this doctrine is in itself the best answer that can be made to Socinians. If Christ was only an inspired teacher, his death is of very small importance to us ; because it gives no demonstration of the kindness of God, and therefore can neither give peace to a troubled conscience, nor excite grateful affection ; and also, because it gives no high measure of the guilt and danger of sin, and therefore cannot impress us strongly with a sense of its inherent malignity. We thus lose the whole benefit of Christianity as a *palpable* exhibition of the Divine character, and are thrown back again on the inefficiency and vagueness of abstract principles. In this view likewise, all those passages of Scripture in which our gratitude, our reverential esteem, and our filial confidence, are so triumphantly challenged on the ground of the death of Christ, become empty unmeaning words : For, if Christ was not God, there is no necessary or natural connexion between the belief of his death and the excitement of such senti-

ments in our hearts towards God ; while, on the supposition that he was God, the connexion is most distinct and unavoidable. In fact, if Jesus Christ was merely a man, the greatest part of the Bible is mere bombast. To a man who disbelieves the inspiration of the Bible, this of course is no argument. But surely he ought not, in a matter of such unspeakable importance, to reject a doctrine which may be true, without examining it in all its bearings. He ought not to take the account of it upon trust, when he has the record itself to apply to. He is right to reject an absurd statement ; but he is wrong to decide without investigation that this absurd statement is contained in the Bible. Let him consult the Bible,—let him consider what this doctrine declares of the character of God,—let him trace the natural effects of its belief on the character of man,—let him understand that it expands our ideas of the Divine holiness by the very demonstration which attracts our love, that it quickens the sensitiveness of conscience by the very demonstration which gives peace to the conscience,—and he may continue to reject it ; but he will not deny

that there is a reasonableness in it—that it contains all the elements of a perfect doctrine—that it is most glorifying to God and most suitable to man. To sum up my observations on this subject : The doctrine of the atonement, by the incarnation and death of Christ, is illustrative of the Divine mercy, and vindicative of the Divine holiness; it is a foundation of hope before God, amply sufficient for the most guilty of men ; and it is fitted to implant in the vilest heart which will receive it, the principles of true penitence and true gratitude, of ardent attachment to the holy character of God, and of a cordial devotion to his will.

The hallowed purpose of restoring men to the lost image of their Creator, is in fact the very soul and spirit of the Bible ; and whenever this object does not distinctly appear, the whole system becomes dead and useless. In creeds and confessions this great purpose is not made to stand forth with its real prominency ; its intimate connexion with the different articles of faith is not adverted to ; the point of the whole argument is thus lost, and Christianity is misapprehended to be a mere list of mysterious

facts. One who understands the Bible may read them with profit, because his own mind may fill up the deficiencies, and when their statements are correct, they may assist inquirers in certain stages, by bringing under their eye a concentrated view of all the points of Christian doctrine, and they may serve, according to their contents, either as public invitations to their communion, or as public warnings against it, and they may stand as doctrinal landmarks; but they are not calculated to impress on the mind of a learner a vivid and useful apprehension of Christianity. The object in them is not to teach religion, but to defend it; and whilst they keep their own place, they are beneficial. But any person who draws his knowledge of the Christian doctrines exclusively or principally from such sources, must run considerable risk of losing the benefit of them, by overlooking their moral objects; and, in so doing, he may be tempted to reject them altogether, because he will be blind to their strongest evidence, which consists in their perfect adaptation to these objects. The Bible is the only perfectly-pure source of Divine knowledge; and the

man who is unacquainted with it, is in fact ignorant of the doctrines of Christianity, however well read he may be in the schemes and systems and controversies which have been written on the subject.

The habit of viewing the Christian doctrines and the Christian character as two separate things, has a most pernicious tendency. A man who, in his scheme of Christianity, says, "here are so many things to be believed, and here are so many to be done," has already made a fundamental mistake. The doctrines are the principles which must excite and animate the performance : They are the points from which the lines of conduct flow ; and as lines may be supposed to be formed by the progress of their points, or to be drawn out of their substance, so the line of Christian conduct is only formed by the progressive action of Christian principle, or is drawn out of its substance.

The doctrines of revelation form a great spiritual mould, fitted by Divine wisdom for impressing the stamp of the Christian character on the minds that receive them. I shall here mention some of the leading

features of that character, as connected with the corresponding doctrines.

The love of God is the radical principle of the Christian character; and to implant this principle, is the grand object and the distinct tendency of the Christian doctrines. And it may be proper here to repeat an observation which has been already much insisted on,—that this love is not a vague affection for an ill-defined object, but a sentiment of approbation and attachment to a distinctly-defined character. The Bible calls us to the exercise of this affection, by setting before us a history of the unspeakable mercy of God towards man. At first sight, it might seem impossible to conceive any way in which the mercy of God could be very strikingly or affectingly manifested towards his creatures. His omnipotence and unbounded sovereignty make every imaginable gift cheap and easy to him. The pardon of the sins committed by such feeble worms, seems no great stretch of compassion in so great and so unassailable a monarch. God knew the heart of man. He knew that such would be his reasonings; and he prepared a work of mercy, which

might in all points meet these conceptions. God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son for its salvation. His was not the benevolence which gives an unmissed mite out of a boundless store,—it was a self-sacrificing benevolence, which is but meagrely shadowed forth by any earthly comparison. We admire Codrus sacrificing his life for his country; we admire the guide plunging into the quicksand to warn and save his companions; we admire the father suffering the sentence of his own law in the stead of his son; we admire Regulus submitting to voluntary torture for the glory of Rome: But the goodness of God, in becoming man, and suffering, the just for the unjust, that he might demonstrate to them the evil of sin,—that he might attract their affections to his own character, and thus induce them to follow him in the way of happiness,—was a goodness as much superior to any human goodness, as God is above man, or as the eternal happiness of the soul is above this fleeting existence; and, if believed, must excite a proportionate degree of admiration and gratitude.

The active and cordial love of our fellow-creatures is the second Christian duty. And can this sentiment be more powerfully impressed upon us, than by the fact, that Christ's blood was shed for them as well as for ourselves; and by the consideration that this blood reproaches us with the basest ingratitude, when we feel or act maliciously, or even slightly, towards those in whom our heavenly Benefactor took so deep an interest? Under the sense of our Lord's continual presence, we shall endeavour to promote even their temporal welfare; but, above all, we shall be earnest for the good of their souls, which he died to redeem.

Christians are commanded to mortify the earthly and selfish passions of ambition and avarice and sensuality. Our Lord died that he might redeem us from such base thralldom, and allure us to the pure liberty of the sons of God. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, were in fact his murderers. If we love him, we must hate them: If we love our own peace, we must hate them; for they separate the soul from the Prince of Peace. The happiness of eternity consists in a confor-

mity to the God of holiness ; and shall we spend our few days in confirming ourselves in habits directly opposed to him ? — No ; rather let us begin heaven below, by beginning to be holy.

The gospel exhorts us to humility ; and deep humility, indeed, must be the result of a true acquiescence in the judgment which God passed upon us when he condemned his Son as the representative of our race. And when we think of what our Almighty Father hath done for us, our hearts must often convict us of the strange contrast which is exhibited betwixt our dealings with him and his dealings with us.

We are commanded to be diligent in the duties of life, and to be patient under its sufferings. And to enforce this precept, we are instructed that the minutest event of life is ordered by him who loved us and gave himself for us ; and that all these events, how trifling or how calamitous soever they may appear, are yet necessary parts of a great plan of spiritual education, by which he trains his people to his own likeness, and fits them for their heavenly inheritance.

He walked himself by the same road ; only it was rougher ; and he hath shown us by his example, that the cross is a step to glory.

The Scriptures teach, that the sentence of death falls upon all mankind, in consequence of the transgression of the first individual ; and that eternal life is bestowed on account of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. The grand moral purpose for which this doctrine is introduced, is to impress upon our minds a sense of the punishment due to transgression—of the exceeding opposition which exists between sin and happiness, and of the exceeding harmony which subsists between perfect holiness and eternal glory. The death of a single individual could give no adequate manifestation of the pernicious nature of sin. Death appears sometimes rather as a blessing than an evil ; and in general no moral lesson is received from it, except the vanity of earthly things. But when a single offence is presented to us, and there is appended to it the extinction of a whole race as its legitimate consequence, we cannot evade the conviction of its inherent ma-

lignity. As the value of this lesson, if really received, infinitely overbalances in the accounts of eternity the loss of this brief mode of our existence, there can be no just ground of complaint against the great Disposer of all things.

In the same way, the hope of eternal life through the obedience of Christ, suggests to us the idea of the strong love and approbation which God feels for moral perfection, and the indissoluble connexion in the nature of things between happiness and holiness.

The Divine government in this respect is just a vivid expression of the great moral attribute of God, "that he loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity." A simple pardon, bestowed without any accompanying circumstances, must have drawn some degree of gratitude from the criminal, if he knew his danger; and this would have been all: But when he views the perfect and holy obedience of a great benefactor as the ground of his pardon, he is induced to look with love and admiration towards that obedience which gained the Divine favour, as well as towards the friend who paid it. A feeling of humble and affectionate de-

pendence on the Saviour, a dread and hatred of sin, and a desire after holiness, are the natural fruits of the belief of this doctrine.

That plan of the Divine government by which God deals with men through a representative, occupies an important place in revealed religion. In the observations which I have here made on this subject, as well as through the whole course of the Treatise, I have in a great measure confined my remarks to the direct connexion which subsists between the doctrines of the Bible, and the character which the belief of them is fitted to produce in the mind of man : And with this view, I have called the attention of the reader principally to the superiority in real efficiency which palpable facts, as illustrative of moral principles, possess over a statement of the same principles when in an unembodied and abstract form : But I should be doing a real injury to the cause which I wish to advocate, were I to be the means of conducting any one to the conclusion, that Christianity is nothing more than a beautiful piece of moral mechanism, or that its doctrines were mere

typical emblems of the moral principles in the Divine mind, well adapted to the understandings and feelings of men. Supposing the history of Codrus to be true, he was under a moral necessity to act as he did, independently of any intention to infuse the spirit of patriotism into his countrymen; and, supposing the Bible to be true, God was under the moral necessity of his own character, to act as he is there represented to have done. The acts there ascribed to him are real acts, not parabolical pictures: They were not only fitted and intended to impress the minds of his creatures—they were also the necessary results and the true vindications of his own character. This belief is inseparably connected with a belief of the reality of Christ's sufferings; and if Christ's sufferings were not real, we may give up the Bible. These sufferings are the foundation of a Christian's hope before God, not only because he sees in them a most marvellous proof of the Divine love, but also because he sees in them the sufferings of the representative of sinners. He sees the denunciations of the law fulfilled, and the bitter cup of in-

dignation allotted to apostacy drained to the very dregs ; and he thus perceives that God is just even when justifying the guilty. The identity of the Judge and the victim dispels the misty ideas of blind vindictiveness with which this scheme may sometimes have been perversely enveloped ; and he approaches God with the humble yet confident assurance that he will favourably receive all who come to him in the name of Christ. Whilst he continues in this world, he will remember that the link which binds heaven and earth together is unbroken, and that his great Representative does not in the midst of glory forget what he felt when he was a man of sorrows below. This relation to the Saviour will spiritualize the affections of the believer, and raise him above the afflictions of mortality ; and will produce in him a conformity to the character of Christ, which is another name for the happiness of heaven.

I have hitherto been considering the Christian doctrines chiefly as facts embodying the principles of the Divine character ; but this spiritual union with the Saviour, as the head and representative of his peo-

ple, gives to his religion a deeper interest and a sublimer and more unearthly character than could be excited or expressed by the highest views of holy and gracious worth, even in its more glorious and most lovely operation. We know something of what his official employment is in the sanctuary above; we know something of his glory and of his joy: And shall we not, even in this vale of tears, endeavour to enter into his holy desires, and sympathize with his affections, and triumph in his universal dominion?—He once suffered for us—He now reigns for us. His people were once represented on the cross at Calvary, and they are now represented on the throne of Heaven.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is also connected with most important moral consequences. He is represented as dictating originally the revealed word, and as still watching and assisting its progress. He is where the truth is, and he dwells in the hearts where it operates. The general idea of the omnipresence of God is chiefly connected with the belief of his providence and protection, his approving or condemn-

ing; but the doctrine of the Spirit is connected in the minds of Christians simply with a belief of his accompanying and giving weight and authority to revealed truth. The truth becomes thus closely associated in their minds with a sense of the presence and the gracious solicitude of God.

With regard to the mode of the operation of the Holy Spirit on the human mind, the Bible says nothing;—it simply testifies the fact. To this divine agent we are directed to apply, for the enlightening of the eyes of our understanding, for strength in the inner man, and for all the Christian qualities. These effects are in other places of Scripture referred to the influence of revealed truth itself. We are also told, that the Spirit takes of the things relating to Christ, and presents them to the soul. We may gather from this, that the Spirit never acts, except through the medium of the doctrines of the Bible. He uses them as instruments naturally fitted for the work. He does not produce the love of God, except by the instrumentality of that divine truth which testifies of the

moral excellency and kindness of God. He does not produce humility, but through the medium of that truth which declares the extent and spirituality of the requirements of God's law. This doctrine, then, does not in the slightest degree invalidate the argument in favour of revelation, which has been deduced from the natural connexion between believing its doctrines and obeying its precepts. These doctrines would of themselves persuade and sanctify a spirit which was not by inclination opposed to their tendency. This divine agent does not excite feelings or emotions in the mind, independent of reason or an intelligible cause : The whole matter of the Bible is addressed to the reason, and its doctrines are intelligible causes of certain moral effects on the characters of those who believe them. The Spirit of God brings these causes to act upon the mind with their natural innate power. This influence, then, is quite different from that inspiration by which prophets were enabled to declare future events. It is an influence which probably can never be distinguished, in our consciousness, from the innate influence of

argument or motive. A firm-minded man, unused to the melting mood, may on a particular occasion be moved and excited by a tale of woe far beyond his common state of feeling : His friends may wonder at an agitation so unusual ; they may ask him how this story has affected him more than other stories of a similar nature ; but he will not be able to give any other reason than what is contained in the distressing facts which he had been listening to. His greater susceptibility in this instance might have originated from some change in his bodily temperament, or from certain trains of thought which had previously been passing through his mind : But these circumstances did not make the impression ; they only made him more fit to receive the impression from an object which was naturally calculated to make it. The impression was entirely made by the story,—just as the impression upon wax is entirely made by the seal, although heat may be required to fit it for receiving the impression.

I have used this illustration to show that the influence of the Spirit does not necessarily destroy, and is not necessarily

independent of, that natural relation of cause and effect which subsists between the doctrines taught and the moral character recommended by the Bible.

When the prophet Elisha was surrounded in Dothan by the Syrian army, he felt no fear, because he placed full confidence in the protection of God. But his servant was terrified by the appearance of inevitable ruin. It pleased God, however, to deliver him at once from his agitation and perplexity, even before he thought fit to remove the appearance of the danger. And how was this effected? God opened the young man's eyes, and he saw and beheld the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. God here interposed miraculously, in order to calm the man's spirit. But mark the nature of the interposition; God dealt with the man as a reasonable Being,—he gave him ocular demonstration of his safety. He did not work in his mind an unaccountable intrepidity in the face of danger which *he* could not have explained, but discovered to him a fact, which, from the nature of the human mind, could not fail of dispelling

his fearful apprehensions. Had he given full credit to the assurances of his master, his mind would have been at peace without the interposition of this supernatural revelation. But although he acknowledged his master to be a prophet, yet he did not place that implicit reliance on his testimony which was sufficient to overcome the violent excitement produced in his mind by the visible objects of terror which surrounded him. When his eyes were opened, he saw and believed; and this belief brought peace. It was not the miraculous interposition abstractly, which produced this effect; it was the glorious army of guardian angels, miraculously unveiled to his eye, which inspired him with confidence, and enabled him to despise the Syrian power: If, instead of these friendly hosts, he had seen the angel whom David saw with a sword drawn over Jerusalem, the sight would only have increased his alarm. It is then the object believed, from whatever source the belief proceeds, whether from seeing or hearing, which operates on the mind.

That the belief of the gospel is, in every instance, the work of the Holy Spirit, no

one who believes in the Bible can doubt ; and indeed this doctrine is the ground of the Christian's confidence that he shall continue stedfast unto the end : But still it must be remembered, that it is not the supernatural agency itself abstractly, which gives Christian peace and Christian strength to the mind, but the history of the Saviour's work, which through this medium is spiritually revealed to it. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia to attend to the things spoken by Paul. If our notions of divine influence lead us away from attending to the things contained in the gospel, we are deluding ourselves. And on the other hand, if our mode of studying the Bible does not cultivate in us a conviction of our own weakness, and an habitual dependence on the operations of the Holy Spirit, we certainly do not belong to that society who are said to be " all taught of God," and have no spiritual discernment of the truth : When we study the doctrines of revelation, we ought to study them in that connexion in which they stand in the Bible itself. They are not given to us for the purpose of exercising our faculties in

speculative discussion, but for practical usefulness. The observance of this rule will save us from much perplexity, and many a thorny and agitating question. In the Bible, this doctrine of Divine influence which we are now considering, is uniformly connected with the most explicit declarations, that man is free to act, and responsible for his actions. Man's inability to obey God consists absolutely in his unwillingness, and is but another name for the greatest degree of this. There is nothing to prevent him from embracing the gospel, and walking in the ways of holiness, but his own opposite inclinations. "This is the condemnation, that light has come unto the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil," John iii. 19. It is worthy of remark, that our Lord makes this statement in that very conversation in which he insists on the necessity under which every individual lies of being spiritually born again, before he can enter the kingdom of God. In the Gospel, sinners are called upon, not to be supernaturally influenced, but to believe the Divine testimony. And the question at last will be, not by what

influence or arguments were you led to the Saviour, but, did you embrace his offered salvation? It is not very uncommon to hear religious persons speak of faith and holiness merely as evidences of a Divine operation on the heart, and as valuable simply on this account. But such language is not borrowed from the Scriptures. Here we find faith and holiness considered as qualities valuable in themselves, and as duties imperative on all to whom the message is published. “Repent (i. e. change your principles) and believe the gospel,” is the substance of the first discourse preached, after the ascension of our Lord, to his very murderers. And this same exhortation is thrown loose upon the world, and when rejected, is rejected wilfully and at the peril of the rejectors. The evidences for the gospel, both external and internal, are suited to the human faculties; and so too is the substance of its contents. A sinner who admits its evidence, and who reads it with the attention which such an admission demands, and who finds in it peace to his conscience and good hope for eternity, through the great atonement, will assured-

ly, if he has indeed made this happy discovery, acknowledge, with humility and gratitude, the kindness of God in leading him out of darkness into this marvellous light; and he will continue to look to that divine and unseen influence, which first stopped him in his downward course, for support and encouragement during the remainder of his pilgrimage. And he who is condemned for rejecting the gospel will be condemned on this ground, viz. that he might, as well as ought, to have done otherwise; and that he has resisted the conviction both of his reason and conscience, which had testified against him. It is our duty and our privilege to look to the free offer of salvation, and the sufficiency of the atonement; and we are wandering from the Bible, and from peace, and from piety, when we occupy our thoughts with such difficulties.

But why was this doctrine revealed, and what benefit is to be derived from believing it? What effect is the belief of it calculated to produce on our characters; and what light does it throw on the character of God, or on the condition of man? As

the work of the Spirit is to enlighten the eyes of our understanding with regard to divine truth and to take of the things of Christ and show them to us, the belief of this doctrine of course includes the conviction, that we stand in need of this light, and that the inclination of our hearts naturally leads us from the things of Christ. This conviction, if real, will humble us before God, and excite us to a jealous vigilance over every motion of our minds. In this doctrine, also, God gives a manifestation of his own character. He presents himself to his weak and ignorant creatures, as ready to meet all their wants, and supply all their deficiencies ; and thus condescends to solicit their confidence. He promises his Spirit to those who ask ; and thus invites and stimulates them to hold frequent intercourse with himself by prayer. He declares his holy anxiety for the advancement of the truth ; and thus attracts their attention and regard to it.

When the arguments of the gospel alarm or confirm or comfort the mind, the Holy Spirit is present ; and the belief of this will unspeakably enforce the argument,—just

as we often find that the presence and voice of a friend will give weight to reasons which would be disregarded in his absence. If God thus offers us his spiritual presence and support through the medium of his truth, ought not we ever to carry about with us the remembrance and the love of the truth, that we may enjoy much of his presence and support? If he is so watchful over the progress of Christian principle in the hearts of men, ought not we also to be watchful, lest we grieve him, and lest we lose the precious benefits of his instructions? As the gospel confines the influence of the Spirit to the truths contained in the written word, there is nothing to fear from fanaticism. The Holy Spirit does not now reveal any thing new, but impresses what is already revealed.

SECTION V.

It thus appears that the gospel is a great storehouse of medicines for the moral diseases of the human mind. It contains arguments most correctly fitted to act powerfully on our reason and on our feelings; and these arguments are in themselves naturally destructive of moral evil. They give a life and a reality to the shadowy traits of natural religion; they exhibit in a history of facts the abstract idea of the Divine character; and thus they render that character intelligible to the comprehension, and impressive on the heart of man. And is there no need for this medicine? If it be admitted that wickedness and misery reign in this world to a frightful extent, and that nothing is more common than a strange carelessness about our Creator, and a decided spirit of hostility to the holiness of his character,—if it be admitted that there prevails through the hearts of our spe-

cies, a proud selfishness of disposition which looks with indifference on the happiness or misery of others, unless where interest or vanity makes the exception,—and that whilst we profess to believe in a future state, we yet think and act as if our expectations and desires never stretched beyond this scene of transitory existence,—if all this be admitted, surely it must also be admitted that some remedy is most desirable. And when we consider that the root of all these evils is in the heart,—that the very first principles of our moral nature are corrupted,—that the current of our wills is different from that of God's,—and that whilst this difference continues, we must be unhappy, or, at best, most insecure of our enjoyment, in whatever region our lot of existence is cast,—the necessity of some powerful health-restoring antidote will appear still more imperious. And can we think it improbable, that a gracious God would meet this necessity, and reveal this antidote? We have advanced a considerable step when we have admitted this probability. And when we see a system such as Christianity, asserting to itself a divine

original—tending most distinctly to the eradication of moral evil—harmonizing so beautifully with the most enlightened views of the character of God, and adapted so wonderfully to the capacities of man,—does not the probability amount to an assurance that God has indeed made a movement towards man, and that such an antidote is indeed contained in the truth of the gospel?

There are few minds darkened or hardened to such a degree, that they cannot discern between moral good and evil. Hence it happens that the pure morality of the gospel is generally talked of with praise; and this is all: They admire the dial-plate of the timepiece, and the accurate division of its circle; whilst they altogether pass over that nice adjustment of springs and weights which give its regulated movement to the index: They see not the Divine wisdom of the doctrines, which can alone embody that pure morality in the characters of those who receive them.

Exactly from the same inadvertence, it is sometimes asked, “Why so urgent with these abstruse and mysterious doctrines?”

It is, to be sure, very decent and proper to believe them: But the character is the great point; and if that be reformed, we need not care much about the means." These persons do not consider, that though it may be comparatively easy to restrain the more violent eruptions of those dispositions which are mischievous to society, it is no easy matter to plant in the heart the love of God, which is the first and greatest moral precept of Christianity. They do not consider that the character is in the mind; and that this character must receive its denomination of good or bad, according as it capacitates its possessor for happiness or misery, when in direct contact with the character of God. The obedience of the will and of the heart is required; and this implies in it a love for those holy principles in which the rule of duty is founded. A mere knowledge of duty, even when joined with a desire to fulfil it, can never inspire this love. We cannot love any thing, by simply endeavouring to love it: In order to this, we must see somewhat in it which naturally attracts our affections. Whatever this *somewhat* may be, it constitutes

the doctrine which forms our characters on that particular subject. This law holds in all such operations of the mind ; but most conspicuously does it hold where the natural bent of the inclination takes an opposite course,—as in the case of Christian duty. Duty must be presented to our minds, as associated with circumstances which will call forth our love,—as associated with the impulses of esteem, of gratitude, and interest,—else we can never love it. These circumstances constitute the Christian doctrines ; and the reasonableness of continually and closely urging them, is founded on that law of the human mind which has been alluded to. It is not easy to cast out pride and self-conceit from the heart, nor to look upon the distresses of life with a cheerful acquiescence in that sovereign will which appoints them. It is not easy for a mind which has been much engrossed by its outward relations to the visible system with which it is connected, to receive and retain a practical impression, that there is, throughout the universe, one great spiritual and invisible dominion, to which all these lesser systems are subservient, and in which

they are embraced ; and that these are but schools and training seminaries in which immortal spirits are placed, that they may learn to know and to do the will of God. It is not a mere knowledge of duty which will enable us to resist the noxious impressions which are continually emanating from the objects of our senses, and from the relations of life—to disregard the pressing temptations of ambition or indolence, of avarice or sensuality—to expel those worldly anxieties which corrode the soul—and to run the way of God's commandments, through difficulties and dangers, through evil report and good report. These things require a more energetic principle than the knowledge, even when conjoined with the approbation of what is right. The love of God must be rooted in the heart; and this can only be accomplished by habitually viewing him in all the amiableness of his love and of his holiness. We must acquaint ourselves with God ; for it is the knowledge of his high character alone which can humble the pride of man, or throw light on the obscurities of his condition here, or call forth that sentiment of

devoted love which will stamp the Divine image on his heart ; and it is a conformity to that character alone which can make us freemen of the universe, and secure to us tranquillity and joy in every region of creation ; because this conformity of character is the living principle of union which pervades and binds together the whole family of God, and capacitates the meanest of its members for partaking in the blessedness of their common Father.

It should be observed, that when conformity to the Divine character is mentioned as the result of a belief of the Christian doctrine, it is very far from being meant that the conformity will be perfect, or that the character will be free from failings, or even considerable faults : All that is meant is, that the principle which will produce a perfect conformity is there. Thus we may say that a child has a conformity to his father's will, if he is strongly attached to him, and is sincerely anxious to please him, although levity or passion may occasionally carry him off from his duty. This is only the budding-time of Christianity ; eternity is the clime in which the flower blows. If

it were perfected here, there would be no occasion for death,—this world would be heaven.

When we talk of love towards an invisible being, we evidently mean love to the principles of his character. Love to God, therefore, implies a knowledge of his character; and thus, if in our idea of God, we exclude his holiness and justice and purity, and then give our affection to the remaining fragments of his character, we do not in fact love God, but a creature of our own imagination. It is a love of the whole, which can alone produce a resemblance of the whole; and nothing short of this love can produce such a resemblance. If this world bounded our existence, there would be little occasion for these heavenly views; because the order of society can in general be tolerably preserved by human laws, and the restraint of human opinion; and for the few years which we have to pass here, this is sufficient: But if we are placed here to become fitted for eternity, we must know God, and love him, in order that we may have pleasure in his presence, and in the manifestations of his will.

There is an important part of the subject still untouched, which is intimately connected with the principle of the preceding argument, and is most deserving of a full and minute consideration : I mean the harmony which subsists between the views of the Bible, and that system of events which is moving on around us. On this point, however, I shall only make a very few general observations.

If we look on this world as a school in which the principles of the Bible are inculcated and exercised, we shall find that the whole apparatus is admirably fitted for the purpose. As adventures of danger are adapted to exercise and confirm the principle of intrepidity, so the varied events of life are adapted to exercise and confirm the principles of the Christian character. The history of the world, and our own experience of it, present to us as it were a scene of shifting sand, without a single point on which we may reasonably rest the full weight of our hopes with perfect confidence. The gospel presents to us, on the other hand, the unchangeable character of God, and invites us to rest there. The object

of our hope becomes the mould of our characters ; and happiness consists in a character conformed to that of God. But there is a constant tendency in our minds to occupy themselves with the uncertain and unsatisfactory things which are seen, to the exclusion of that secure good which is unseen. Pain, disappointment, and death, are therefore sent to awaken us to reflection, —to warn us against reposing on a shadow, which will stamp on us its own corruptible and fleeting likeness, —and to invite us to fix our feet on that substantial rock which cannot fail. The happiness which God intends for men (according to the Bible) consists in a particular form of character; and that character can only be wrought out by trials and difficulties and afflictions. If this were practically remembered, it would associate in our minds the sorrows of life with solid happiness and future glory. Every event, of whatever description it be, would appear to us as an opportunity of exercising and strengthening some principle which contains in itself the elements of happiness. This consideration would swallow up, or at least very much abate, the de-

jection or exultation which the external form of the event is calculated to excite, and produce cheerful and composed acquiescence in the appointments of Providence. “In every thing give thanks; for this (event, whether prosperous or adverse) is the will of God in Christ Jesus towards you.” It forms a part of that system of wisdom and love, of which the gift of Christ is the prominent feature and the great specimen. Christ was given to bring men near to God, and every part of the system of Providence is ordered with the same design. The Captain of our salvation was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs;” and whilst his wisdom appoints the medicinal sorrow, his heart sympathizes with the sufferer. His sufferings were not only endured in satisfaction of Divine justice,—they also serve as a pattern of the way by which God leads those real sinners whom the sinless Saviour represented, unto holiness. When two of his disciples asked him for the chief places in his kingdom, the nature of which he had much mistaken, he answered them, “Can ye drink of the cup which I drink of, and can ye be

baptised with the baptism which I am baptised with?"—thus teaching, that as his own way to glory lay through sorrows, so theirs did also. His road and his glory were the patterns of theirs. Not that happiness and glory are given as an arbitrary premium for having suffered, but that the character which has been most exercised and refined by affliction contains a greater proportion of the constituent elements of happiness and glory. Neither are we to suppose that afflictions necessarily produce this character: Indeed, the effect in many cases is the very reverse. But afflictions are important opportunities of acquiring and growing in this character; which, as they cannot be neglected without danger, so they cannot be improved according to the directions of the gospel without leading to a blessed result. The continual presence of God watching over the progress of his own work, and observing the spirit in which his creatures receive their appointed trials, is a great truth, which, if believed and remembered, would both excite to cheerful and grateful action, and would comfort under any sorrow.

Every event affords opportunities of exercising love to God or man, humility, or heavenly-mindedness; and thus every event may be made a step towards heaven: So that, if we were asked what sort of a theatre the principles of the gospel required for its effectual operation on a being like man, it would be impossible to devise any which would appear even to our reason so suitable as the world which we see around us. Were the gospel different, or were man different, another theatre might be better; but whilst the human heart remains as it is, we require just such a process as that which is carried on here, for working the principles of the gospel into our moral constitutions. We know, besides, that the Christian character is adapted to the events of life; because it would produce happiness under those events, whatever they might be. Thus it appears, that the heart of man, the Bible, and the course of Providence, have a mutual adaptation to each other; and hence we may conclude, that they proceed from the same source,—we may conclude, that the same God who made man, and encompassed him with the trials of

life, gave the Bible to instruct him how these trials might be made subservient to his eternal happiness.

The world then is a theatre for exercising and strengthening principles. Its events operate on the moral seeds in the human mind, as the elements of nature, heat, moisture, and air, do on vegetable seeds. They develope their qualities, they foster them into life and energy, they bring forth into full display all their capacities of evil and good—but they do the same office to poisonous and useless seeds as to the most excellent. How careful then ought we to be that the moral principles of our minds should be of the right kind! Poisonous plants are native to this soil, whilst the immortal seed of divine truth is an exotic, from a more genial clime. But if this course of discipline be so necessary for the growth and conformation of the truth in the heart, then the gospel may appear to be exclusively addressed to those who have a series of years and exercises before them. In what form can it approach a deathbed? What has the Bible to say to a man within an hour of eternity, who has either never

heard, or never attended, to the message of peace? In fact, it speaks the same language to him that it does to the youth just entering on the career of life—the same glad tidings are proclaimed to sinners of all ages—of all conditions, and in all circumstances; “This is the testimony that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”—Although happiness is necessarily connected with, or more properly is identical with, that holiness which the belief of the truth induces; yet pardon and acceptance are not the consequences of a change of character, they are the free gift of God, through Jesus Christ; and that they are so, enters into the very substance of that record which we are called on to believe, as the testimony of God.

The judicial sentence against sin has been executed, and the honour of the divine law has been vindicated, by a deed of unutterable love, which claims from men the most grateful and reposing confidence in the reality of that mercy, and the inviolableness of that truth which, amidst the agonies of death, declared the work of reconciliation accomplished. The belief of

this transaction, if full and perfect, would at once, and instantaneously, change the heart into a conformity with the will of God, which is the character of heaven, without which heaven could be no place of happiness. It is the weakness, the deficiency, and unsettledness of this belief, which makes the transformation of the heart, in general, so tardy a process. The tardiness does not, however, belong to the nature of the truth, but to the mode of its reception. And that Spirit, which is mighty in operation, can open the spiritual eye at the last moment to perceive the excellency of the Saviour, and thus cause the young germ of glory to burst forth at once into full and vigorous life.

Very sudden and unexpected changes of character do sometimes take place in the history of this world's moralities; and it may perhaps assist our conception, to adduce an example of this kind in illustration of that higher and more important change which we are at present considering. Mr. Foster, in his "Essay on Decision of Character," gives an account of a man who, from being a perfect prodigal, became all at

once a most beggarly miser. Whilst yet a boy he had come to the possession of a large fortune, and before he was of age he contrived to get rid of it by a course of the most profligate extravagance. After his last shilling was gone, his spirits fell, and he went out with the thought of putting an end to his life. Providence directed him to the top of an eminence, from which he could survey every acre which he had so foolishly squandered. Here he sat down, and in bitterness of heart contrasted his former splendour with his present wretchedness. As he viewed his past life, the absurdity of his conduct appeared to him so glaring, and want appeared so frightful, that he was filled with a loathing for every thing like expense. He instantly formed the resolution of retracing his steps, and recovering his possessions. He descended the hill a thorough miser, and continued so to his death. The principle of penurious and greedy saving had expelled its opposite, and taken firm hold of his soul; his character was entirely changed, and his future life was only a development of the feeling acquired in that moment.

Now, though the change from one mode of selfishness to another, as in this instance, is a very different thing from the conversion of the heart to God ; yet as the change of character in both cases arises from *a real change in the conviction of the mind as to what is truly good*, (from whatever sources of influence these convictions may proceed, whether earthly, as in the one case, or heavenly, as in the other,) I consider myself entitled to use this analogy as an argument against those who either ridicule sudden conversions as absurd fables, or who confine such events to the miraculous period of Christianity. Is it rational to suppose, that a conviction of the love of God—of the vastness of eternity—of the glory of heaven—of the misery of hell, should be insufficient to produce an instantaneous change of no light nature, when we see so striking a change produced by the comparative prospect of wealth or poverty for a few uncertain years ? Shall we suppose that the Spirit of God hath less power than the spirit of Mammon ? or, Does it belong only to things which pass away, to exert a sovereignty over the springs of the mind ? And

are things which abide for ever, to be alone considered as powerless and inefficient? Could we imagine such a thing as a *paradise for misers* under the government of a God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, we might safely say, that if the young man, whose history we have been contemplating, had dropped down dead as he descended from the eminence which had witnessed his resolution, he would have been fit for a situation there. Nor would his former conduct have debarred him from the full enjoyment of its delights. So when the pardoning mercy of God is perceived in its glory and its beauty, it capacitates the mind immediately, however dark and vile before, for that bliss which it so freely bestows, and girds and prepares the parting traveller for that everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, an entrance into which it so abundantly ministers, even though this may be the first look he has ever cast towards that happy land, and the last look he takes of aught until the body returns to the dust, and the spirit to him who gave it.

The Bible never shuts out hope ; and in the example of the thief on the cross, it invites the dying sinner to look, that he may live for ever. But the Bible never encourages the negligent, nor the presumptuous—it warns of the uncertainty of life and opportunity, and it exhibits the difficulty of overcoming settled habits of sin, under the similitude of the leopard changing his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin. In truth, every hour of delay makes this change more difficult and improbable,—because every hour is giving growth and strength to principles of an opposite description ; he is grieving and despising the Holy Spirit, and is making a dark league with hell, which is gaining validity and ratification by every act in accordance with it !

SECTION VI.

I HAVE already explained two causes why spiritual Christianity is so much opposed, and so rarely received with true cordiality amongst men. The first is, that its uncompromising holiness of principle arms against it all the corruptions of our nature : The second is, that it rarely gains an attentive and full consideration, so as to be apprehended in all its bearings, both in relation to the character of God and its influence on the heart of man.

I shall now mention another circumstance, nearly connected with the second of these causes, which often opposes the progress of true religion.

Many persons, in their speculations on Christianity, never get farther than the miracles which were wrought in confirmation of its divine authority. Those who reject them are called infidels, and those who admit them are called believers ; and yet,

after all, there may be very little difference between them. A belief of the miracles narrated in the New Testament, does not constitute the faith of a Christian. These miracles merely attest the authority of the messenger,—they are not themselves the message: They are like the patentee's name on a patent medicine, which only attests its genuineness, and refers to the character of its inventor, but does not add to its virtue. Now, if we had such a scientific acquaintance with the general properties of drugs, that from examining them we could predict their effects, then we should, in forming our judgment of a medicine, trust to our own analysis of its component parts, as well as to the inventor's name on the outside; and if the physician whose name it bore was a man of acknowledged eminence in his profession, we should be confirmed in our belief that it was really his invention, and not the imposture of an empiric, by observing that the skill displayed in its composition was worthy of the character of its assigned author, and that it was well suited to the cases which it was proposed to remedy. And even though the name

should be somewhat soiled, so as to be with difficulty deciphered, yet if the skill were distinctly legible, we should not hesitate to attribute it to a man of science, nor should we scruple to use it ourselves, on its own evidence, if our circumstances required such an application.

If Alexander the Great could, by his own skill, have discovered, in the cup presented to him by Philip, certain natural causes restorative of health, his confidence in the fidelity of his physician would have had a powerful auxiliary in his own knowledge of the subject. The conviction of his friend's integrity was, in his case, however, sufficient by itself to overcome the suspicions of Parmenio. But if, by his own knowledge, he had detected any thing in the cup which appeared to him decidedly noxious, his confidence in his friend would have only led him to the conclusion, that this cup was really not prepared by him, but that some traitor, unobserved by him, had infused a poisonous ingredient in it.

In like manner, if we discern that harmony in the Christian revelation which is the stamp of God upon it, we shall find

little difficulty in admitting that external evidence by which he attested it to the world. And even though our opportunities or acquirements do not qualify us for following the argument in support of miracles, yet if we are convinced that the remedial virtue of its doctrines suits the necessities and diseases of our nature, we will not hesitate to assign it to the Great Physician of souls as its author, nor will we scruple to use it for our own spiritual health.

No one who knows what God is, will refuse to receive a system of doctrines which he really believes was communicated by God: But then, no one in the right exercise of his reason, can, by any evidence, be brought to believe that what appears to him an absolute absurdity, did ever in truth come from God. At this point, the importance of the internal evidence of revelation appears most conspicuous. If any intelligent man has, from hasty views of the subject, received the impression that Christianity is an absurdity, or contains absurdities, he is in a condition to examine the most perfect chain of evidence in its support, with the simple feeling of astonish-

ment at the ingenuity and the fallibility of the human understanding. On a man in this state of mind, all arguments drawn from external evidence are thrown away. The thing which he wants is to know that the subject is worth a demonstration ; and this can only be learned by the study of the Bible itself. Let him but give his unprejudiced attention to this book, and he will discover that there is contained in it the development of a mighty scheme, admirably fitted for the accomplishment of a mighty purpose : He will discover that this purpose is no less than to impart to man the happiness of God, by conforming him to the character of God : And he will observe with delight and with astonishment, that the grand and simple scheme by which this is accomplished, exhibits a system of moral mechanism, which, by the laws of our mental constitution, has a tendency to produce that character, as directly and necessarily as the belief of danger has to produce alarm, the belief of kindness to produce gratitude, or the belief of worth to produce esteem. He will discern, that this moral mechanism bears no mark of imposture or delusion, but

consists simply in a manifestation of the moral character of God, accommodated to the understandings and hearts of men. And lastly, he will perceive that this manifestation only gives life and palpability to that vague though sublime idea of the Supreme Being, which is suggested by enlightened reason and conscience.

When a man sees all this in the Bible, his sentiment will be, "I shall examine the evidence in support of the miraculous history of this book; and I cannot but hope to find it convincing: But even should I be left unsatisfied as to the continuity of the chain of evidence, yet of one thing I am persuaded,—it has probed the disease of the human heart to the bottom; it has laid bare the source of its aberration from moral good and true happiness; and it has propounded a remedy which carries in itself the proof of its efficiency. The cause seems worthy of the interposition of God: He did once certainly display his own direct and immediate agency in the creation of the world; and shall I deem it inconsistent with his gracious character, that he has made another immediate mani-

festation of himself in a work which had for its object the restoration of innumerable immortal spirits to that eternal happiness, from which, by their moral depravation, they had excluded themselves?"

The external evidence is strong enough, if duly considered, to convince any man of any fact which he has not in the first place shut out from the common privilege of proof, by pronouncing it to be an impossibility. This idea of impossibility, when attached to the gospel, arises generally, as was before observed, from some mistaken notion respecting the matter contained in it. A very few remarks may be sufficient to show that this is the case. Those who hold this opinion do not mean to say *absolutely* that it is impossible to suppose, in consistency with reason, that God ever would make a direct manifestation of his own immediate agency in any case whatever; because this would be in the very face of their own general acknowledgments with regard to the creation of the world: They must therefore be understood to mean no more, than that, considering the object and structure of Christianity, it is unrea-

sonable to suppose that it could be the subject of a direct interposition from Heaven. We are thus brought precisely to the argument which it has been the intention of this Essay to illustrate.

Now, if we suppose that it was one of the objects of the Creator, in the formation of the world, to impress upon his intelligent creatures an idea of his moral character—or, in other words, to teach them natural religion (and that it was one of his objects, we may presume, from its having in some measure had this effect),—it follows, that a direct and immediate agency on the part of God, is closely connected with the design of manifesting his moral character to man; and we may expect to meet these two things linked together in the system of God's government. If, therefore, the gospel contains a most vivid and impressive view of the Divine character, harmonizing with the revelation of nature, but far exceeding it in fulness and in power, are we to be surprised at an interposition in its behalf of the same agency which was once before exhibited for a similar purpose? Thus, the object of the gos-

pel, and its adaptation to that object, become the great arguments for its truth; and those who have not studied it in this relation, are not competent judges of the question. Indeed, if we take the truth of the gospel for granted, we must infer that this distinct and beautiful adaptation of its means to its end, was intended by its Divine Author as its chief evidence; since he must have foreseen that not one out of a hundred who should ever hear of it could either have leisure or learning to weigh its external evidence. And this will explain a great deal of infidelity; for freethinkers in general are not acquainted with the substance of revelation; and thus they neglect that very point in it on which God himself rested its probability, and by which he invites belief.

There may be also, for any thing that the reasoners of this world know, cycles in the moral world as well as in the natural; there may be certain moral conjunctures, which, by the divine appointment, call for a manifestation of direct agency from the great First Cause; and in this view, a miraculous interposition, though posterior

to the creation, cannot be considered as an infringement of the original scheme of things, but as a part, and an essential part of it. When the world was less advanced in natural science than it is at present, a comet was considered an infringement on the original plan. And the period may arrive, and will assuredly arrive, when the spirits of just men made perfect shall discern as necessary a connexion between the character of God and all the obscurities of his moral government in our world, as the philosopher now discerns between the properties of matter and the movements of the various bodies belonging to our planetary system.

If the gospel really was a communication from heaven, it was to be expected that it would be ushered into the world by a miraculous attestation. It might have been considered as giving a faithful delineation of the Divine character, although it had not been so attested ; but it could never have impressed so deep a conviction, nor have drawn such reverence from the minds of men, had it not been sanctioned by credentials which could come from none

other than the King of kings. As this conviction and this reverence were necessary to the accomplishment of its moral object, the miracles which produced them were also necessary. Under the name of miraculous attestations, I mean merely those miracles which were extrinsic to the gospel, and did not form an essential part of it; for the greatest miracles of all—namely, the conception, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord—constitute the very substance of the Divine communication, and are essential to the developement of that Divine character which gives to the gospel its whole importance.

The belief of the miraculous attestation of the gospel, then, is just so far useful as it excites our reverence for, and fixes our attention on the truth contained in the gospel. All the promises of the gospel are to faith in the gospel, and to those moral qualities which faith produces; and we cannot believe that which we do not understand. We may believe that there is more in a thing than we can understand; or we may believe a fact, the causes or modes of which we do not understand; but our ac-

tual belief is necessarily limited by our actual understanding. Thus, we understand what we say when we profess our belief that God became man, although we do not understand *how*. This *how*, therefore, is not the subject of belief; because it is not the subject of understanding. We, however, understand *why*,—namely, that sinners might be saved, and the Divine character made level to our capacities; and therefore this is a subject of belief. In fact, we can as easily remember a thing which we never knew, as believe a thing that we do not understand. In order, then, to believe the gospel, we must understand it; and in order to understand it, we must give it our serious attention. An admission of the truth of its miraculous attestation, unaccompanied with a knowledge of its principles, serves no other purpose than to give a most mournful example of the extreme levity of the human mind. It is an acknowledgment that the Almighty took such a fatherly interest in the affairs of men, that he made a direct manifestation of himself in this world, for their instruction; and yet they feel no concern

upon the subject of this instruction. Nevertheless, they say, and perhaps think, that they believe the gospel. One of the miraculous appearances connected with our Saviour's ministry places this matter in a very clear light. When on the Mount of Transfiguration, he for a short time anticipated the celestial glory in the presence of three of his disciples, a voice came from Heaven saying, "*This is my beloved Son ; hear ye him.*" He was sent to tell men something which they did not know. Those therefore, who believed the reality of this miraculous appearance, and yet did not listen to what he taught, rejected him on the very ground on which it was of prime importance that they should receive him.

The regeneration of the character is the grand object ; and this can only be affected by the pressure of the truth upon the mind. Our knowledge of this truth must be accurate, in order that the image impressed upon the heart may be correct ; but we must also know it in all the awfulness of its authority, in order that the impression may be deep and lasting. Its motives must be ever operating on us—its re-

presentations ever recurring to us—its hopes ever animating us. This will not relax, but rather increase our diligence in the business of life. When we are engaged in the service of a friend, do we find that the thought of that friend and of his kindness retards our exertions?—No. And when we consider all the business of life as work appointed to us by our Father, we shall be diligent in it for his sake. In fact, however clearly we may be able to state the subject, and however strenuous we may be in all the orthodoxy of its defence, there must be some flaw in our view of it, if it remains only a casual or an un-influential visitor of our hearts. Its interests are continually pressing: eternity is every moment coming nearer; and our characters are hourly assuming a form more decidedly connected with the extreme of happiness or misery. In such circumstances, trifling is madness. The professed infidel is a reasonable man in comparison with him who admits the Divine inspiration of the gospel, and yet makes it a secondary object of his solicitude.

The Monarch of the Universe has pro-

claimed a general amnesty of rebellion, whether we give or withhold our belief or our attention ; and if an amnesty were all that we needed, our belief or our attention would probably never have been required. Our notions of pardon and punishment are taken from our experience of human laws. We are in the habit of considering punishment and transgression as two distinct and separate things, which have been joined together by authority, and pardon as nothing more than the dissolution of this arbitrary connexion. And so it is amongst men ; but so it is not in the world of spirits. Sin and punishment there are one thing. Sin is a disease of the mind which necessarily occasions misery ; and therefore the pardon of sin, unless it be accompanied with some remedy for this disease, cannot relieve from misery.

This remedy, as I have endeavoured to explain, consists in the attractive and sanctifying influence of the Divine character manifested in Jesus Christ. Pardon is preached through him, and those who really believe are healed ; for this belief implants in the heart the love of God and

the love of man, which is only another name for spiritual health. Carelessness, then, comes to the same thing as a decided infidelity. It matters little in what particular way, or on what particular grounds we put the gospel from us. If we do put it from us either by inattention or rejection, we lose all the benefits which it is fitted to bestow ; whilst, on the other hand, he who does receive it, receives along with it all those benefits, whether his belief has originated from the external evidence, or simply from the conviction of guilt and the desire of pardon, and the discovery that the gospel meets his necessities as a weak and sinful creature,—just as a voyager gains all the advantage of the information contained in his chart, whatever the evidence may have been on which he at first received it.

This last illustration may explain to us why God should have declared *faith* to be the channel of all his mercies to his intelligent creatures. The chart is useless to the voyager, unless he believes that it is really a description of the ocean which he has to pass, with all its boundaries and rocks and

shoals and currents; and the gospel is useless to man, unless he believes it to be a description of the character and will of that Great Being on whom his eternal interests depend. Besides, the nature of the gospel required such a reception in another point of view: It was necessary to its very object that its blessings should be distinctly marked out to be of free and unmerited bounty. When we speak of benefits freely bestowed, we say of them, "You may have them by asking for them,"—distinguishing them by this mode of expression as gifts, from those things for which we must give a price. Precisely the same idea is conveyed by the gospel declaration, "Believe and ye shall be saved." When it is asked, How am I to obtain God's mercy? the gospel answers, that "God has already declared himself reconciled through Jesus Christ; so you may have it by believing it." Faith, therefore, according to the gospel scheme, both marks the freeness of God's mercy, and is the channel through which that mercy operates on the character.

It has been my object, throughout this Essay, to draw the attention of the reader

to the internal structure of the religion of the Bible,—first, because I am convinced that no man in the unfettered exercise of his understanding can fully and cordially acquiesce in its pretensions to Divine inspiration, until he sees in its substance that which accords both with the character of God and with the wants of man ; and secondly, because any admission of its Divine original, if unaccompanied with a knowledge of its principles, is absolutely useless.

We generally find, that the objections which are urged by sceptics against the inspiration of the Bible, are founded on some apparent improbability in the detached parts of the system. These objections are often repelled by the defenders of Christianity as irrelevant ; and the objectors are referred to the unbroken and well-supported line of testimony in confirmation of its miraculous history. This may be a silencing argument, but it will not be a convincing one. The true way of answering such objections, when seriously and honestly made, seems to me to consist in showing the relation which these detached parts bear to the other parts, and then in explaining the harmony

and efficiency of the whole system. When a man sees the fulness and beauty of this harmony, he will believe that the system of Christianity is in truth the plan of the Divine government, whether it has actually been revealed in a miraculous way or not; and if he finds that the fact of its being inspired really enters into the substance of the system, and is necessary to it, he will be disposed to believe that too.

Let us suppose a man brought from the heart of Africa, perfectly ignorant of the discoveries of Europe, but of excellent parts: Let him be fully instructed in all the mathematical and physical knowledge connected with the Newtonian philosophy, but without having the system of astronomy communicated to him; and then let us suppose that his instructor should announce to him that most perfect and most beautiful of human discoveries under the name of a direct revelation from Heaven. The simplicity and the grandeur of the theory would fill his imagination, and fasten his attention; and as he advanced in the more minute consideration of all its bearings, the full and accurate agreement of its principles

with all the phenomena of the heavenly bodies, would force on his mind a conviction of its truth. He may then be supposed to say to his instructor, "I believe that you have unfolded to me the true system of the material universe, whether you are really under the influence of inspiration or not. Indeed, the most thorough belief in your pretensions could scarce add an iota to my conviction of the truth of your demonstration. I see a consistency in the thing itself, which excludes doubting."

We judge of the probability or improbability of a new idea, by comparing it with those things which we are already acquainted with, and observing how it fits in with them. The complete fitting-in of the astronomical system with facts already observed, is the ground of our belief in its truth. The materials of the system lie around us in the appearances of nature ; and we are delighted to find an intelligible principle which will connect them all. If a person has paid no attention to these appearances, he will feel proportionally little interest in the discovery of a connecting principle ; because he has not felt that uneasiness of

mind which is produced by the observation of unexplained facts. A certain degree of education is necessary to excite this uneasy curiosity ; and therefore both its pains and its pleasures are confined to a very limited number. But when the facts to be explained are connected with a deep and universal moral interest, and when the most ordinary powers of thinking are equal to the intellectual exertion which is required, there can be no limitation either of the number of the students or of the intensity of the excitement, except in consequence of the most lamentable carelessness.

The materials of the Christian system lie thick about us. They consist in the feelings of our own hearts, in the history of ourselves and of our species, and in the intimations which we have of God from his works and ways, and the judgments and anticipations of conscience. We feel that we are not unconcerned spectators of these things. We are sure, that if there be a principle which can explain and connect them all together, it must be a most important one for us ; it must determine our everlasting destiny. It is evident that this

master-principle can exist nowhere but in the character of God. He is the universal Ruler, and he rules according to the principles of his own character. The Christian system accordingly consists in a development of the Divine character ; and as the object of this development is a practical and moral one, it does not linger long to gratify a speculative curiosity, but hastens forward to answer that most interesting of all inquiries, “ What is the road to permanent happiness ? ” This question holds the same rank in moral questions, and enters as deeply into the mystery of God’s spiritual government, as the corresponding question, “ What law regulates and retains a planet in its orbit ? ” does in the natural world.

If a planet had a soul and a power of choice, and if, by wandering from its bright path, it incurred the same perplexities and difficulties and dangers that man does when he strays from God, — and if the laws which directed its motions were addressed to its mind, and not, as impulses, on its material substance, — its inquiry, after it had left its course, would also be, “ How shall I regain my orbit of peace and of glory ? ” The an-

swer to this question would evidently contain in it the whole philosophy of astronomy, as far as the order of its system was concerned. In like manner, the answer to the inquiry after spiritual and permanent happiness, embraces all the principles of the Divine government as far as man is concerned.

The answer to the planet would contain a description of its proper curve: But this is not enough,—the method of regaining it and continuing in it must be also explained. We may suppose it to be thus addressed,—
 “Keep your eye and your thoughts fixed on that bright luminary, to whose generous influences you owe so many blessings. Your order, your splendour, your fertility, all proceed from your relation to him. When that relation is infringed, these blessings disappear. Your experience tells you this. Retrace, then, your steps, by recalling to your grateful remembrance his rich and liberal kindness. This grateful and dependent affection is the golden chain which binds you to your orbit of peace and of glory.”

To man's inquiry after permanent happiness, an answer is given to the same pur-

pose. The path of duty and of happiness is marked out in such precepts as the following : “ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and soul and mind and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself ;” “ Glorify God in your bodies and your spirits, which are God’s ;” “ Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” But this is not enough. Man has wandered from this good path, and in wandering from it, he has come under the influence of base attractions, which draw away his will in opposition to the testimony of his conscience, and the acknowledgments of his understanding. To overcome these misleading influences, the gospel introduces an attracting principle, most holy in its nature and most constraining in its power. It reveals to him the full danger of his wanderings, but it reveals also to him the full mercy and loveliness of his God. It declares that God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but

have everlasting life—and that Christ hath redeemed us from the condemnation of the law, having endured that condemnation in our stead—and that, on as many as receive Him, he confers the privilege of being the sons of God. This is the great truth, for the manifestation and development of which this world was created, and is preserved—and this it is, which, when perceived in all its vast reality by the light of the Holy Spirit, transforms the slave of sin into a child of God, and an heir of immortal glory. And any one who humbly and candidly considers the Divine character of love and of holiness which is developed in the history of Jesus Christ, will discover in it the true centre of moral gravitation—the Sun of Righteousness, set in the heavens to drive darkness and chaos from our spiritual system, and by its sweet and powerful influence to attract the wandering affections of men into an orbit, appointed by the will and illumined by the favour of God. According to this system, a grateful and humble affection towards God, founded on a knowledge of his true character, is the principle of order and of

happiness in the moral world. The confusion and the restlessness which we see in the world, and which we often experience in our own breasts, give abundant testimony to the truth of this proposition in its negative form. Ignorance and indifference about the character of God generally prevail; we love the creature more than the Creator—the gifts more than the giver—our own inclinations more than his will. The wind is sown, and can we wonder that the whirlwind is reaped? And is it not evident to reason, that an entire conformity to the Ruling Will of the universe, is only another name for order and happiness? and can this conformity be produced in any rational being, except by a knowledge and a love of that will? The character of God is manifested in the history of Jesus Christ, for our knowledge and for our love. This manifestation harmonizes with the suggestions of reason and conscience on the subject: Nay more, it gathers them up, as they lie before the wind in detached fragments; it supplies their deficiencies, and unites them all in one glorious fabric of perfect symmetry and beauty. It meets

the heart of man in all its capacities and affections ; its appeal is exactly shaped for the elementary principles of our nature. The glorious truth which it reveals is adapted to every mind ; it is intelligible to a child, and yet will dilate the understanding of an angel. As the understanding enlarges, this truth still grows upon it, and must for ever grow upon it, because it is the image of the infinite God. Yet, great as it is, it is fitted to produce its effect, wherever it is received, however limited the capacity into which it enters. The principle of the wedge operates as fully at the first stroke as at any subsequent one. although the effect is not so apparent.

I have endeavoured, in the course of these remarks, to give an idea of the mode which seems to me best fitted for illustrating the harmony which subsists between the Christian system and the mass of moral facts which lie without us and within us. I have endeavoured to explain the greatness of its object, and its natural fitness for the accomplishment of that object. He who has not given his earnest attention to

these things, may call himself an infidel, or a believer, but he has yet to learn what that doctrine is which he rejects or admits.

There is nothing new in this cursory sketch of Christian doctrines. Indeed, I should conceive a proof of novelty on such a subject as tantamount to a proof of error. But I think that the view here taken has not been sufficiently pressed as an argument in favour of the credibility of revelation; for, although an indirect kind of evidence in itself, it seems well fitted for preparing and disposing an unbeliever to examine with candour the more direct proof which arises from historical testimony. And it may also perform the no less important office of infusing into a nominal Christian, a doubt as to his sincerity in the profession of a faith which has perhaps neither made a distinct impression on his understanding, nor touched his heart, nor affected his character.

THE END.

C. S. Lizars, Printer,
Society.

THEOLOGICAL WORKS,

RECENTLY PUBLISHED BY

WAUGH & INNES,

HUNTER SQUARE,

EDINBURGH.

An ESSAY on FAITH, by THOMAS ERSKINE, Esq. Second Edition, with Corrections and Additions, 12mo. 3s. bds.

LETTERS chiefly PRACTICAL and CONSOLATORY: designed to Illustrate the Nature and Tendency of the Gospel. By DAVID RUSSELL, Minister of the Gospel, Dundee. Vol. 1st. Second Edition, 12mo. 4s. 6d. bds.

The SAME WORK, vol. 2d., just published. 12mo. 4s. 6d. bds.

SACRAMENTAL ADDRESSES, and MEDITATIONS: intended to aid Devotion, and to Exhibit the Consoling and Purifying Influence of the Cross of Christ. By the REV. HENRY BELFRAGE, vol. 1st. Third Edition, 12mo. 5s. bds.

The SAME WORK, vol. 2d. Second Edition, 12mo. 5s. 6d. bds.

PRACTICAL DISCOURSES, intended to Promote the Improvement and Happiness of the Young. By the REV. HENRY BELFRAGE. Second Edition, 12mo. 4s. 6d. bds.

THEOLOGICAL TRACTS, by the late JOHN BOWDLER, JUN., Esq. of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister at Law. *Now first published separately*, 12mo. 5s. 6d. bds.

TESTIMONIES to the TRUTHS of NATURAL and REVEALED RELIGION, extracted from the Works of Distinguished Laymen. By the REV. JAMES BREWSTER, Minister of Craig. 12mo. 5s. 6d. bds.

The EVIDENCE and AUTHORITY of the CHRISTIAN REVELATION. By THOMAS CHALMERS, D. D. Sixth Edition, 8vo. 8s. bds.

An INQUIRY into the BOOKS of the NEW TESTAMENT. By JOHN COOK, D. D. Professor of Divinity in St. Mary's College, St. Andrew's. 8vo. 12s. bds.

The EVIDENCE and AUTHORITY of DIVINE REVELATION. Being a View of the Testimony of the Law and the Prophets to the MESSIAH, with the Subsequent Testimonies. By ROBERT HALDANE. 2 vols. 8vo. 12s. bds.

THEOLOGICAL WORKS

Published by WAUGH & INNES, Edinburgh.

DOMESTIC RELIGION; or an Exposition of the Precepts of Christianity, Regarding the Duties of Domestic Life. By WILLIAM INNES, Minister of the Gospel. Second Edition, 12mo. 3s. 6d. bds.

TWO DISSERTATIONS.—THE FIRST an Inquiry into the kind of Evidence on which Men believe in the Christian Revelation, and how far Divine Wisdom appears in connecting Salvation with the belief of a Testimony.—THE SECOND on the principal design of the Law of Moses, and the relation it bore to the Covenant made with Abraham. By WILLIAM INNES, Minister of the Gospel, 12mo, 3s. boards.

LECTURES in DIVINITY. By the Late GEO. HILL, D. D. Principal of St. Mary's College, St Andrew's. Edited from His Manuscript, by his Son, the REV. ALEX. HILL, Minister of Dailly. 3 vols. 8vo. L.1, 16s. bds.

DISCOURSES and ESSAYS, on Subjects of Public Interest. By STEVENSON MACGILL, D. D., Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow. 12mo. 6s. 6d. bds.

AN EXPOSITION of the EPISTLE to the HEBREWS, with Preliminary Exercitations. By JOHN OWEN, D. D. The Second Edition, in 7 vols. 8vo. L.4, 4s. bds.

A LETTER on the PRINCIPLES of the CHRISTIAN FAITH. Written by HANNAH SINCLAIR, Eldest Daughter of the Right Honourable SIR JOHN SINCLAIR, BART. To which is prefixed a Memoir by the REV. LEGH RICHMOND. The Fourteenth Edition, 18mo. 2s. 6d. bds.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY; or a connected view of the Scheme of Christianity, in which the Facts and Statements of Scripture are Examined, and the Doctrines and Inferences deducible from them Illustrated and Enforced. By the REV. JAMES ESDAILE, Minister of the East Church Parish of Perth. 8vo. 10s. 6d. bds.

A POPULAR ENQUIRY into the DOCTRINE of SCRIPTURAL TYPES. By the REV. JOHN WILSON, Minister of Irvine, 8vo.

MEMOIR of MRS. DR. PATERSON, of ST. PETERSBURGH. With Extracts from her Diary and Meditations, 12mo. 3s. 6d. bds.

AN

ESSAY ON FAITH.

AN
ESSAY
ON FAITH.

BY
THOMAS ERSKINE, Esq. ADVOCATE;
II
AUTHOR OF "REMARKS ON THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR
THE TRUTH OF REVEALED RELIGION."

THIRD EDITION,
WITH CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS.

EDINBURGH:
WAUGH AND INNES, HUNTER-SQUARE.

M.DCCC.XXIII.

Printed by Balfour & Clark,
Edinburgh, 1823.

S12
212
MW
7

AN

ESSAY ON FAITH.

WE read in the Scriptures, “ that a man
“ is justified by faith, without the deeds of
“ the law,” Rom. iii. 18.—that “ by grace
“ are ye saved through faith,” Eph. ii. 8.—
that the glory of the Gospel consists in this,
that “ God’s method of justification by faith
“ is revealed in it,” Rom. i. 17.—and that
“ he that believeth on the Son hath ever-
“ lasting life, and he that believeth not the
“ Son shall not see life,” St. John iii. 36.
And these texts do not appear as insulated
observations, nor are they liable to be ex-
plained away as figurative expressions, or
strong language ; they constitute most im-
portant parts in the reasoning of the sacred
writers ; and the general tone of the con-
text is that of sober and unimpassioned ar-
gument. We ought not then to wonder,

that there should be a very lively and inquisitive interest excited in the minds of those who receive the Scriptures as the inspired word of God, about the precise meaning of the term *faith*. Neither ought we to wonder that many different meanings have been assigned to it. For as faith on the one hand, and unbelief on the other, describe states of mind, which appear often to be absolutely involuntary, being the admission of evidence which it is impossible to reject, or the rejection of evidence which it is impossible to admit; men have found it difficult to reconcile their minds to the association of eternal happiness with the one, and of eternal misery with the other, as their just and equitable consequences. To lessen this difficulty, or to remove it, some have supposed that faith was a symbolical expression for the whole regenerate character, or all virtues; and that unbelief was a symbolical expression for the unregenerate character, or all vices. Others have supposed that faith is one of two necessary conditions of pardon, the other condition being obedience, the absence of either of which made the other nugatory, and effectually

excluded from the Divine favour. Others, clearly perceiving that these views could not be reconciled, either with the general tenor of the Bible, or with many most decided and unequivocal texts, have talked disparagingly of holiness and obedience, and have treated of faith as if it were the channel of justification, merely in virtue of an arbitrary appointment of God, and without any reference to its moral effect on the human character.

The observations which follow, relate,

I. To some of the sources of the many errors which have prevailed on the subject of faith.

II. To the nature of faith in general, and of Christian faith in particular.

III. To the mode in which man is addressed, and faith called into action by the Gospel.

IV. To the mutual dependance of faith and sanctification on each other for growth.

V. To the design of faith.

VI. To the design of faith considered as a test of the correctness of faith.

VII. To simplicity of faith, and to the connection between faith and justification.

SECTION I.

SOME OF THE SOURCES OF THE MANY
ERRORS WHICH HAVE PREVAILED ON
THE SUBJECT OF FAITH.

DOUBTLESS the chief source of error on the subject of faith, is the corruption of the heart. There is a great fallacy in supposing that faith is an involuntary act. The Bible speaks of faith as a duty, and of unbelief as a sin. There are some who object to this language, and prefer calling faith a privilege; and truly it is a most unspeakable privilege. But if "he who believes not" is condemned already, because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten "Son of God," surely unbelief is a sin, and it is our *duty* to avoid this sin; John iii. 18. vi. 28, 29. According to the Bible, then, faith is an act of the will, for *duty* and *sin* imply the action of the will. And our reason speaks in the same way. If the belief of any fact naturally and imperatively calls for the performance of a particular duty,

who is the man that will most easily be persuaded of the truth of the fact? He who takes a pleasure in the performance of the duty, or he who detests it? Have not love and fear, and indolence and interest, very considerable influence over our belief? He who knew what was in man, after declaring, that "he who believeth on the Son is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already," adds immediately, "and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have *loved* darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil;" thus most explicitly referring belief and unbelief to the state of the heart and affections. But though the sin of the heart is the root of all errors in religion, yet it is of importance to consider those errors separately, that we may know them, and be prepared for them; for it is by blinding our understandings that the deceitfulness of the heart operates.

In the Bible, Christianity is given us as a whole; but men are apt to take confined and partial views of it. Faith is connected in Scripture, both with the pardon of sin and with the deliverance from the power of

sin ; or, in other words, with justification and sanctification, according to common language. In its connection with justification, it is opposed to merit, and desert, and work of every description ; “ It was by faith that “ it might be by grace, or gratuitous, or “ for nothing,” Rom. iv. 16. Some exclusively take this view, which in itself is correct, but which does not embrace the *whole* truth. Faith, as connected with sanctification, “ purifieth the heart,” “ work-
 “ eth by love,” and “ overcometh the
 “ world,” and produces every thing which is excellent and holy, as may be seen in that bright roll which is given in Heb. xi. Some again are so engrossed with this view of the subject, that they lose sight of the former. This is a fruitful source of error. In order to understand thoroughly the separate parts of a whole, we must understand their connection with the other parts, and their specific purpose in relation to the whole.

The first of the two classes that have been described, call the other *legalists*, or persons who depend on their own performances for acceptance with God. And they

are perhaps right in this accusation ;—but they are not aware that they are very possibly guilty of the same offence. They are almost unconsciously very apt to think, that they have paid faith as the price of God's favour. The man who considers faith merely as the channel by which the Divine testimony concerning pardon through the blood of the Lamb is conveyed to his understanding, and operates on his heart, cannot look on faith as a work, because he views it merely as the inlet by which spiritual light enters his soul. Whilst he who considers the declaration, “ he that believeth shall be “ saved,” as expressing the arbitrary condition on which pardon will be bestowed, without referring to its natural effects on the character, requires to be very much on his guard indeed against a dependance on his faith as a meritorious act. He will not to be sure speak of it in this way, but he runs great risk of feeling about it in this way. And it is not unworthy of observation, that those, whose statements in this respect have been the highest, have often, in their controversies, assumed towards their

opponents a tone of bitterness and contempt, most unbecoming the Christian character. This looks like self-righteousness, and seems to mark that they are trusting rather in their own faith, which elevates them, than in the cross of Christ, which would humble them.

In like manner, the second of these classes charge the other with antinomianism, though they themselves are liable to the same charge. They hate the name of antinomianism, and they wish to escape from it, as far as possible, but they mistake the way. They are so much occupied with the Christian character, that they forget the doctrine of free grace, by the influence of which doctrine alone, that character can be formed. They endeavour to become holy by sheer effort. Now this is impossible. They can never love God by merely trying to love him, nor can they hate sin by merely trying to hate it. The belief of the love of God to sinners—and of the evil of sin—as manifested in the cross of Christ, can alone accomplish this change within them. Those who substitute effort for the Gospel, preach antinomianism; because they preach a doctrine

which can never, in the nature of things, lead to the fulfilment of the law.

I shall have occasion to illustrate these topics farther in the conclusion of the Essay; and, in the meantime, let us consider how, and to what extent, the introduction of scholastic metaphysics into religion has obscured and perplexed the subject of faith.

Theological writers have distinguished and described different kinds of faith, as speculative and practical,—historical, saving and realizing faith. It would be of little consequence what names we gave to faith, or to any thing else, provided these names did not interfere with the distinctness of our ideas of the things to which they are attached; but as we must be sensible that they do very much interfere with these ideas, we ought to be on our guard against any false impressions which may be received from an incorrect use of them. Is it not evident that this way of speaking has a natural tendency to draw the attention away from *the thing to be believed*, and to engage it in a fruitless examination of the *mental operation of believing*? And, accordingly, is it not true, that we see and

hear of more anxiety amongst religious people, about their faith being of the right kind, than about their believing the right things? A sincere man, who has never questioned the Divine authority of the Scripture, and who can converse and reason well on its doctrines, yet finds perhaps that the state of his mind and the tenor of his life do not agree with the Scripture rule. He is very sensible that there is an error somewhere, but instead of suspecting that there is something in the very essentials of Christian doctrine which he has never yet understood thoroughly, the probability is that he, and his advisers, if he ask advice, come to the conclusion that his faith is of a wrong kind, that it is speculative or historical, and not true saving faith. Of course this conclusion sends him not to the study of the Bible, but to the investigation of his own feelings, or rather of the laws of his own mind. He leaves that truth which God has revealed and blessed as the medicine of our natures, and bewilders himself in a metaphysical labyrinth.

The Bible is throughout a practical book, and never, in all the multitude of cases

which it sets before us for our instruction, does it suppose it possible for a man to be ignorant, or in doubt whether he really believes or not. It speaks indeed of faith unfeigned, in opposition to a hypocritical pretence—and it speaks of a dead faith when it denies the existence of faith altogether. We deny the existence of benevolence, argues the Apostle, when fair words are given instead of good offices ; even so we may deny the existence of faith when it produces no fruit, and merely vents itself in professions,—in such a case faith is departed, it is no more, it is dead—there is a carcass to be sure to be seen, but the spirit is gone. In the place to which I am now referring, *viz.* in the second chapter of James, the writer gives another account of dead faith, which is very important ; it occurs in the 19th verse. This faith he calls dead, because it relates to an object which, when taken alone, can produce no effect upon our minds : “ Thou believest that there is one “ God, thou dost well, the devils also believe and tremble.” Now the mere belief of the *unity* of the godhead, however important when connected with other truths, cannot of itself make a man either better

or happier. What feeling or act is there which springs directly from a belief of the *unity* of the godhead? When connected with other things, it does produce effects; thus the devils connect it with a belief in the avenging justice of God, and hence they tremble, because there is no other God, no other power to appeal to. Christians connect it with a belief in the love of God through the Redeemer, and hence they have good hope, for none can pluck them out of His hands. But the abstract belief that there is one God, leads to nothing*.

Since the Epistle of St. James has been thus introduced, it may appear proper that some explanation should be given of the apparent discrepancy between his doctrine and that of St. Paul. The two Apostles are speaking evidently of two different things—St. Paul is speaking of the way in which

* “The doctrine of the Divine Unity alone does not humble the mind, restrain the passions, and reform the life, for no one is more deeply impressed with the necessity of giving the Hindoos the light of Christianity than Ram-mohun Roy, who has had the best opportunities of knowing the effect which their conversion from Idolatry to Unitarian Hindooism has produced.”—*Monthly Repository of Theology for February*, 1823.

a sinner may approach God—St. James is speaking of the way in which the Christian character is confirmed by the various events and duties of life, and in which it manifests its reality to the conviction of men. When Paul says that “a man is justified by faith without works,” he means that a man receives pardon through the channel of faith without any good desert of his own. When James says that “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only,” he means that the character is perfected, not by a principle which lies inert in the mind, but by a principle which exercises itself in action. The use made of the instance of Abraham seems to favour this interpretation. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” The word δικαιουμαι, I am justified or pardoned, as it generally denotes, may signify, I am made, or I become a just or good man; and it does occur in this sense in the version of the Old Testament by the Seventy. I am much disposed to be of opinion that this is the proper meaning of it, in the passage before

us. The general text or subject of the two first chapters is contained in the 2d and 3d verses of the first chapter: “ Brethren, count
 “ it all joy when you fall into divers trials,
 “ knowing this, that the trial of your faith
 “ worketh constancy, or giveth it (your
 “ faith) consistency and endurance.” The Apostle enlarges upon this text : he sets before us the two great springs of character,—the knowledge of God, “ or the word of
 “ truth” received by faith ; and self-will, or self-seeking, or lust, as our translators have rendered it. The tendency of the first is to conform man to the will of God, and to introduce him into the enjoyment of eternal life, and to make him “ a kind of first fruits of the creation :” the tendency of the latter is to conceive sin, which brings forth death. When we are not acting under the influence of the first, we must be acting under the influence of the other. And that principle, under the influence of which we act, gains fresh strength and confirmation by that act. We never stand still ;—our relation to heaven or hell is becoming hourly more and more established. The character thus advances one way or another, and we are ripening either for the harvest of eter-

nal life or of eternal misery continually ; because either the principle of faith or the principle of self-will is exercised by every thought, or word, or deed, that proceeds from us. This is certainly a very important view of the subject, whether it be the right view of the passage or not ; but I think that the context favours it. Thus the reference to Abraham would have this meaning : “ Did the character of our father “ Abraham advance so, that he became the “ friend of God, by sitting still and allowing “ his belief of the Divine kindness to him “ to lie dormant ?—No ; it advanced by action, it was both proved and exercised by “ the offering up of Isaac, and by such exercise was the principle of faith carried “ on to its perfection.” The common interpretation of the passage supposes that “ to “ be justified,” here signifies to be proved just, and means the same thing as the expression in the 18th verse, “ to shew faith “ by works ;” and this may be the true meaning, though I prefer the other as being more coherent with the rest of the argument.

But to return from this digression. It is not an easy, because it is not a natural

exercise of the mind, to look into itself, and to examine its various susceptibilities, and the mode or law according to which these are excited by external objects ; and whilst we are engaged in this manner, we must necessarily remain to a great degree unaffected by those external objects, which we are using merely as parts of the apparatus required for making the experiment on our own faculties. We must endeavour to be in some degree affected by them, in order that we may observe the mode in which they affect us ; but that degree will necessarily be very inconsiderable, in consequence of our attention being chiefly directed towards our own feelings. If I am intent on examining and investigating that pleasing emotion, which is produced in the mind by the contemplation of the beauties of nature, it is impossible that I can feel much of that pleasure. I may be surrounded by all that is sublime and all that is lovely in creation—the rising sun may invite my enthusiasm, but Memnon’s lyre is silent, I remain untouched, for I am contemplating my own mind, and not the scene before me: and that power unseen, which Akenside describes as “ *throned in his bright descend-*

ing car," must attract and absorb the attention, before it can diffuse afar any tenderness of mind. The delightful feeling is produced by contemplating the external object; not by observing nor by knowing *how* we enjoy it. The more thoroughly we are occupied by the object, the more thoroughly will our pleasurable susceptibilities be excited; and the more interrupted and distracted our contemplation of the object is, the more inconsiderable will be the gratification arising from it. We cannot excite the pleasing emotion by mere effort, without the real or imagined presence of its natural exciting object, and whilst we attempt to analyse the origin and progress of the emotion, the object fades from our view, and the sensation dies along with it. Our minds are in this respect like mirrors, and the impressions made on them resemble the images reflected by mirrors. No effort of ours can produce an image in the mirror, independent of its proper corresponding object. When that object is placed before it, the image appears, and when it is withdrawn, the image disappears. And if, in the minuteness of our examination of the image, we look too narrowly into the mirror, we may find

that we have interposed ourselves between the mirror and the object, and that, instead of the image which we expected, our own face is all that we can discover. I beg the reader to bear in mind, that these observations do not at all interfere with the Christian duty of self-examination, which relates not to the philosophy of the human mind, but to the actual state of the human heart.

The science of the human mind requires this reflex exertion, because its object is to examine and discover the laws according to which the mind acts, or is acted upon; but Christianity requires no such act, because its object is not to discover the laws according to which the mind is impressed, but actually to make impressions on the mind, by presenting to it, objects fitted and destined for this purpose by Him who made the mind, and fixed its laws. The objects of religion were not revealed to us, to sharpen our faculties, by observing how they were fitted to impress the mind, but that our minds might really be impressed by them with the characters of happiness and holiness. These characters are the subjects of self-examination, and they are all contained in the Divine precepts. Do we love God and our neigh-

hour, and do we give proof of the reality of our love by corresponding action? This is a very different process from that to which I am referring. My object is, to point out the folly of attempting or expecting to make any impressions on our minds by mere effort, instead of bringing them into contact with those objects which God has made known to us in the Gospel as the proper means of producing those impressions—and especially to warn against that particular species of this general error, which consists in considering rather *how* we believe than *what* we believe.

From this metaphysical habit of considering and attending to the mind itself, and the mode in which it is impressed, rather than to the objects which make the impression, arose the division of faith into different kinds; and thus the feelings of men were substituted in the place of the tangible word of revelation.

A true faith does not properly refer to the mode of believing, but to the object believed. It means the belief of a true thing. As a correct memory does not refer to the process by which the impression is made,

but to the accurate representation of the fact remembered. It means the remembrance of a thing as it happened. When, after hearing a person relate incorrectly any history with which we are acquainted, we say, "he has a bad memory," we mean merely that he has not remembered what happened. So when we say that a man has a wrong belief of a thing, we ought to mean merely that he does not believe the thing which really happened. The way to correct the memory is not to work with the faculty itself independently of its object, but to attend more minutely and carefully to that object. And this is the only way of correcting the belief too. Were a man, when endeavouring to recollect some circumstance which had escaped him, to direct his attention to the act of recollection rather than to the thing to be remembered, he would infallibly fail in his purpose. In like manner, if he wishes to believe any thing, there can be no more successful way of thwarting his own wish, than by directing his attention to the mental operation of believing, instead of considering the thing to be believed, and the evidence of its truth.

But is there no such thing as a wrong or false way of believing what is true? Are not the most important truths often believed without producing the slightest effect on the character? Do we not sometimes find men who are even willing to die as martyrs to the truth of a doctrine which never influenced a feeling of their hearts? Let us select two of our acquaintances, and let us question them separately as to their religious belief, concerning God and eternity, and their own duties and their own hopes; the answers which they give are in substance the same, and yet their paths in life are diametrically opposite; the life of the one is in harmony with the belief which he professes, the other's is not. They are both incapable of deceit; how then are we to account for this difference, except by supposing that there is a right and a wrong way of believing the same thing? This is certainly a very important question, and it seems to me capable of a very satisfactory solution. Although these two persons use similar language, and appear to believe the same things, yet in reality they differ essentially in the subject-matter of their be-

lief. But this requires farther illustration. We are so much accustomed to satisfy ourselves with vague ideas on the subject of religion, that we are easily deceived by a general resemblance of statements with regard to it; and the word *faith* has been so much withdrawn from common use, and so much devoted to religious purposes, that it has very much lost its real import. To have faith in a thing, to believe a thing, and to understand a thing as a truth, are expressions of the same import. No man can be properly said to believe any thing which is addressed to his thinking faculty, if he does not understand it.

Let us suppose a Chinese, who can speak no language but his own, brought before an English jury as a witness. Let him bring with him certificates and testimonials of character which place his truth and integrity above all suspicion. There is not a doubt entertained of him. But he gives his evidence in his own language. I ask, does any one jurymen believe him? Certainly not,—it is absolutely impossible—nobody understands a word that he utters. If, during the course of the evidence, the jury were

asked whether or not they believed what he was telling them, would they not smile at the question? And yet they know that it is truth. They *understand* that the witness is an honest man, and they *believe* as far as they understand, but they *can believe* no farther. An interpreter is brought—he translates the evidence; *now* the jury understand it, and their belief accompanies their understanding. If one of the jury had understood Chinese, the difference between his belief and that of the rest, would have been accurately measured, by the difference of their understandings. They all heard the same sounds, and saw the same motions, but there was only one of them, to whom these symbols conveyed any meaning. Now the meaning was the thing of importance to be believed—and the proof of the man's integrity was of consequence merely on account of the authority which it gave to his meaning.

Faith and reason are so often talked of as not only distinct from, but even opposed to, each other, that I feel it of importance to press this point, by farther examples from familiar life. Several merchants receive

from their correspondent at a distance, letters recommending them to follow a particular course in their trade, in order to escape a threatened loss, and to insure a considerable profit. And this advice is accompanied by the information and reasons on which it is founded. The speculation requires a good deal of hardihood, and a most implicit confidence in the information communicated. One of the merchants, on reading his letter, cannot believe that he is in any such danger as is represented to him—he declares the letter a forgery, and throws it into the fire. Another knows the hand-writing too well, to doubt of its really coming from the person whose name it bears; but he does not believe its contents, and therefore does not act according to its instructions. A third reads his letter as an essay on mercantile affairs in general, without observing the application of it to his own immediate circumstances, or the call that it makes on him for instantaneous action; and therefore he also is unmoved by it. A fourth acknowledges the signature and the authority of the information, but reads the letter carelessly, and takes up a wrong idea of the

course recommended, and sets about a speculation, before he has made himself acquainted with his correspondent's plan; and consequently receives as little benefit from the communication as any of the former. Now, it is quite clear that not one of the four believed the information of their correspondent. Their unbelief is of different kinds, but the result is the same in all. A letter is merely the vehicle of a meaning, and if that meaning is not believed, the letter itself is not believed. The two first understood the meaning of the letter, and rejected it openly and professedly on its own merits. The two last openly and professedly assented to it, but they believed their own interpretation of it, and not the meaning of the writer. It is an absolute absurdity to say that a meaning can be believed without being understood—and therefore nothing which has a meaning can be fully believed until the meaning is understood. When a thing is said or done, of which we don't perceive the meaning, we say, we don't understand that. We are sure that the word has been spoken or the action performed, but we don't apprehend its import. Can we possibly

then *believe* that import? In such cases, understanding and belief are one and the same thing. The third and fourth merchants could, perhaps, both of them, repeat their letter by memory; and the third especially, though ignorant, and therefore unbelieving as to its immediate application, could probably talk well of its general principles, and quote Adam Smith in illustration or defence of it. There is a fifth, who reads, acknowledges the signature, understands the contents, believes them, and acts accordingly. This man believes the meaning of his correspondent, and if the information was good, he reaps the full advantage of it.

In religion there cannot be any cases parallel to that of the second merchant. No man can believe that the Bible was written by God, and at the same time openly profess to disbelieve its contents; and there are not very many who avow their unbelief of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. But there are many nominal Christians in situations very closely resembling that of the jurymen above mentioned, and of the third and fourth merchants. Are there not

many who would be astonished and hurt if their Christianity were doubted, who evidently attach as little meaning to the words *Judgment, Eternity, and Justification by faith in Christ*, as those men did to the Chinese vocables? Can these be said to believe? Are there not many who can speak and reason orthodoxly and logically on the doctrines of the Gospel, and yet do not understand the urgency of these doctrines in application to their own souls? These do not believe the meaning of the Gospel surely. And are there not many who, mistaking the whole scope of the Bible, find in it, what is not there, a plan of justification, in which man performs some part, if not the whole, in the work of redemption; or see in it merely a list and a description of duties, by the performance of which, a man may recommend himself to the favour of God? Those who believe this, believe their own vain imagination, and not the Gospel. A man who is honest in his belief of that which he professes to believe, is certainly free from the charge of deceit and hypocrisy; but his honesty will not convert a lie into a truth: it cannot make that good

news, which is not good news ; it cannot change the import of the Bible, or the will of God. “ Understandest thou what thou “ readest ?” was Philip’s question to the Eunuch ; and it is a question which each reader of the Bible should put most jealously to himself ; for, as it is said in the parable of the sower, “ when any one heareth the “ word of the kingdom, and *understandeth* “ *it not*, then cometh the wicked one and “ catcheth away that which was sown in “ his heart.”

The Jews believed in the Divine authority and inspiration by which Moses spoke—they had much more reverence for his name and honour than the great bulk of professing Christians have for the name and honour of the Saviour—and yet He who knew the thoughts of the heart, declared that they did not believe Moses ; “ for,” says Jesus Christ, “ had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he “ wrote of me ; but if ye believe not his “ writings, how shall ye believe my words ?” He does not mean here to question their belief that God had indeed spoken by Moses ; but to deny their belief of Moses’

meaning. They did not understand Moses, and therefore they could not believe him—they believed their own interpretation of his law, not his meaning in it.

I may understand many things which I do not believe; but I cannot believe any thing which I do not understand, unless it be something addressed merely to my senses, and not to my thinking faculty. A man may with great propriety say, I understand the Cartesian system of vortices, though I don't believe in it. But it is absolutely impossible for him to believe in that system without knowing what it is. A man may believe in the ability of the maker of a system, without understanding it; but he cannot believe in the system itself, without understanding it. Now, there is a meaning in the Gospel, and there is declared in it the system of God's dealings with men. This meaning, and this system, must be understood, before we can believe the Gospel. We are not called on to believe the Bible merely that we may give a proof of our willingness to submit in all things to God's authority, but that we may be influenced by the objects of our belief. When the

Apostle of the Gentiles gives a reason why he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, he does not say because it is a message from the King of kings ; he does not found its importance simply on the authority of the promulgator of it, but in a great measure on its own intrinsic and intelligible value—"For it is the power of God *unto* "*salvation* to every one who believeth," Rom. i. 16. Salvation here signifies *healing*, or deliverance, not from the condemnation, but from the influence of sin. His reason for not being ashamed of this Gospel then was, because it was the mighty instrument which God had prepared for healing the spiritual diseases of men. The great importance of the object to be attained by the publication of the Gospel invested it with its high dignity. But he does not leave his Roman disciples here ; he explains to them *how* this great object is attained—he tells them what it is in the Gospel which produces this effect—"for," continues he, in the 17th verse, "herein is revealed God's "plan of justification by faith." Righteousness, through this Epistle, almost without exception, signifies the mercy of God ma-

nifested in pardoning sinners for the sake of the atonement of Christ. He is afterwards at much pains to demonstrate to them, that the belief of this mercy has, from the very nature of man, that healing influence which he had ascribed to it. I may remark here, that the passage of Malachi, in which the Messiah is predicted under the figure of the Sun of Righteousness, or forgiving mercy, bears a striking resemblance in meaning to the verses which have been quoted from the Epistle to the Romans. The Apostle represents justification, or the remission of sins, as the prominent feature and characteristic of the Gospel, and to this he ascribes the whole of its healing or salutary power,—and the prophet's eye, in like manner, is caught by the absorbing glory and brilliancy of this plan of redemption. He sees from afar a new manifestation of the Divine character rising on the dark world—many and diversified are the high attributes of that character ; but as the different rays of the natural light, when combined, appear but one brightness—so the many rays of that spiritual light, when combined, appear but one Sun of mer-

cy—and the beams which this Sun shoots forth, are pardons, which heal the hearts they enter.

In order, then, to the believing of the Gospel, it is necessary that the plan of justification by faith should be understood ; because this is the prominent feature of the Gospel, and because the benefits betowed by the Gospel, are communicated to the soul through the knowledge of this doctrine.

SECTION II.

THE NATURE OF FAITH IN GENERAL, AND
OF CHRISTIAN FAITH IN PARTICULAR.

WHAT is the difference between knowledge or understanding, and faith? Our understanding of a thing means the conception which we have formed of it, or the impression which it has made on our mind, without any reference to its being a reality in nature independent of our thought, or a mere fiction of the imagination: And faith is a persuasion, accompanying these impressions, that the objects which produced them are realities in nature, independent of our thought or perception. This persuasion of reality accompanies all the different modes in which our knowledge is acquired, as well as the testimony of others. When an object is presented to my eye, the impression which it makes upon me is accompanied by the persuasion, that the object which produced it is truly described by the impres-

sion which it has made, and that it is a reality independent of myself. When a proposition in mathematics is demonstrated to me, a persuasion accompanies my understanding of it, that these relations of quantities are fixed and unalterable, and altogether independent of my reasoning. When the generous or kind conduct of a friend meets my difficulties, my impression of the fact is accompanied by a persuasion of the reality of that generosity or kindness, as qualities existing in my friend's heart altogether independent of my thought or feeling on the subject. When I hear through a channel which appears to me authentic, of some melancholy or some joyful event, there is an accompanying persuasion that there is a real cause for joy or sorrow.

Faith, then, is just an appendage to those faculties of the mind by which we receive impressions from external objects, whether they be material or immaterial. It stands at the entrances of the mind, as it were, and passes sentence on the authenticity of all information which goes in. Now, as faith is merely an appendage to another faculty, is it not evident that its existence and exercise, with regard to any particular object,

must depend on the existence and exercise of that faculty to which the object is addressed? A man born blind has no impressions from light, and therefore he can have no faith with regard to such impressions. He has not the slightest conception of what is meant by a coloured body, and therefore he cannot believe in a coloured body. He may believe that bodies have a quality which he is incapable of perceiving, but what that quality is he does not know, and therefore cannot believe in it. Faith is the persuasion that the impression on the mind was produced by a real object. But if *no impression* is made upon the mind, what room is there for the exercise of belief? If he, like another blind man, has formed an idea that red is like the sound of a trumpet, the impression is a false one, and the belief appended to it is also false, that is, it is appended to a false impression. For faith must always derive its character from the impression to which it is appended.

If the impression is correct, the faith is correct; and if the impression is incorrect, the faith is incorrect. And when we are considering impressions as produced by ob-

jects supposed or known to be real, we may very properly explain faith to be the impression made on our minds by some such object.

A man altogether destitute of the faculty of discerning the relation of numbers and quantities, could not understand how two and two make four;—there could be therefore no impression on his mind corresponding to this truth, and therefore there could be no faith in it. There are many persons whose minds have been so little exercised in this way, that, though they may not by nature be incapable of receiving such impressions, it would yet be absolutely impossible to make them comprehend a mathematical process of any intricacy. These persons may believe certain abstract truths on the authority of others; but they never can believe in the processes by which they are demonstrated, because there are no impressions on their minds corresponding to these processes. The same reasoning holds good with regard to our knowledge and belief on subjects which address our moral faculties, and other internal sensations. We must have impressions made on our minds

corresponding to moral qualities, or to the conditions which address our sensitive nature, before we can believe in those qualities, or in the meaning of those events and conditions. How, for instance, do we become acquainted with the idea of danger, but by an impression of fear produced in our minds? Can we become acquainted with it by any other way? Impossible; for the only meaning of danger is, that it is something fitted to excite fear. How do we become acquainted with the meaning of generous worth and excellence, but by the love, esteem, and admiration, which they excite in us? To a man whose heart is utterly dead to kindness, what meaning could kindness convey? Where there are no moral impressions on the mind, there can be no belief on moral subjects; and according to the degree of the impression is the measure of the belief: For, in fact, the impression is the belief, and the belief is the impression.

In illustration of this, let us suppose two men travelling together whose minds are differently constituted. One has the ordinary degree of alarm at the idea of death;

the other is entirely devoid of any such feeling. They come into a situation in which their lives are endangered. A stranger passing by, interposes between them and the danger, and saves their lives, but at the expense of his own. Our two travellers have both of them the use of their eyes and their ears; they have both of them seen and heard precisely the same things, and when they tell their story, their two narratives agree most minutely: And yet they believe two essentially different things. The one believes that the disinterested and heroic generosity of a stranger has saved them from what he cannot but consider as a dark and awful fate. In consequence of this, he rejoices in his safety as far as his sorrow for his noble benefactor will permit—he feels himself laid under the most sacred obligation to reverence the memory of this benefactor, and to repay to his surviving friends or family that debt of gratitude which he owes for his deliverance. The other understands nothing, and consequently believes nothing of all this—he saw no evil in the death with which they were threatened, and of course no generosity in

him who rescued them from it by encountering it himself—he neither feels joy, nor sorrow, nor gratitude, excited by any part of the history. These two men do not believe the same thing in two different ways; they, in fact, believe two different things. Examine the two impressions. They may be compared to the traces left by the same intaglio on two different substances—the one substance too solid to yield to the pressure, or receive the mould of the sculpture, exhibits nothing perhaps but the oval outline of the stone—whilst the other, possessing the right consistency, and coming in contact with every portion of the substance, receives and retains its perfect image, and exhibits, it may be, lineaments which express all that mind can grasp in thought, or feel in tenderness. The mind of the one traveller has come in contact with every part of the action, and bears away accordingly the impression of the whole; the mind of the other was incapable of coming in contact with the whole, and of course has received a most imperfect and partial impression. We can only know the qualities of things by corresponding susceptibi-

lities in our own minds. The absence of the susceptibility of fear absolutely incapacitated our traveller for understanding danger, and consequently for comprehending the generosity of the stranger's interference, or for perceiving that there was any thing joyful in his own deliverance. The actions of men are not to be considered as mere external shells, or dead carcasses—they in so far resemble those who act them, that they have a spirit and internal life, as well as an outward form—and that this spirit constitutes their character. Of course then we do not understand nor believe a moral action, whilst we do not enter into its spirit and meaning: and we can only enter into the quality of its spirit, through the excitement of the corresponding susceptibilities of our own minds. In morals, we really know only what we feel. We may talk about feelings which we never experienced, and perhaps even correctly enough; but it is just as a blind philosopher may talk about colours.

I have here put the extreme case of the total destitution of a particular susceptibility, and in such a case there can be no

doubt of the result. But it is no less clear, that, even when there is no absolute destitution, there must always be a relative proportion between the degree of susceptibility possessed by the mind, and the capacity for understanding and believing in facts which address these susceptibilities.

There is a considerable analogy between faith and memory, which may serve to illustrate the character of both. As faith accompanies the exercise of the different faculties by which we acquire a knowledge of things external to ourselves, as a judge of the reality or non-reality of the objects which produce the impressions of which the mind is conscious ; so memory accompanies these same faculties as a judge, whether the impressions made on them are new to the mind, or have been present to it before. It is quite evident that no blind man could be said to remember a colour—and that no man whatever could be said to remember what he never received an impression of.

We see, then, that the impression which any object makes on our minds, whatever that impression may be, sums up and defines our knowledge and belief of that ob-

ject. We ought then to guard against being deceived by names. A number of men may receive impressions from the same object, and all these impressions may be different, and yet each of them will give to his own impression, the common name of the object which produced it. An indifferent hearer may, when he listens to their story, suppose that they all know and believe the same thing; but a judicious and curious questioner might discover from their own mouths, that amongst the whole, there are not two impressions alike. Compare, by way of a broad instance, the belief of a moss-rose entertained by a blind man—a man without the sense of smell—and a man in the full exercise of his external senses. There are evidently three different impressions made on these three minds; that is, there are three different beliefs; and yet there is but one name given to the three, and that is, the name of the object to which they all refer.

Every object is composed of many parts and qualities, but all these subdivisions are summed up in the name given to the object which is their aggregate, and he who

uses the general name is presumed to imply all the parts belonging to it. Thus, a pillar of a hundred feet in height is talked of as if it were one and indivisible, whereas it consists of an infinite number of parts, the existence of each of which may be a distinct subject of knowledge and belief. A blind man who runs against it, knows and believes in a few square feet of it ; but he does not believe in the remaining feet, for he has received no impression from them. After he is informed of the dimensions of the pillar, he believes in a quite different thing from what he did before ; or rather, perhaps, to speak more correctly, he believes in a number of things which he could not believe in before, because his mind had not come in contact with them.

In the same way, actions which combine a variety of parts are commonly talked of as indivisible unities, although each motive may be a distinct subject of knowledge and belief, and by its presence or absence make an important change in the general impression. The name remains the same, but the ideas are very different.

The Gospel is a general name likewise for an object which consists of several parts, and contains various appeals to the moral understanding of man. But this general name may cover a great many different impressions and beliefs—and yet there is but one impression that can be the correct representation of the object ; all the rest must be false in a greater or less degree. And it is only the true impression that can be profitable to us. And what is that true impression ? This is only another way of putting the question, What is the Gospel ? for the true impression must be a correct representation of the Gospel in all its meaning. This is the important point ; for if we really understand what the Gospel is, and understand it as a truth, we need not be very solicitous about the *mode* in which we believe it. What is the intention of the Gospel ? Its intention is to renew the character of man after the likeness and will of God. It is to give happiness and holiness to the human heart. And this intention is accomplished by the revelation of the character of God in the work of re-

demption. This is evidently a moral intention, and the object presented to our view for the accomplishment of it is a moral object, even the character of God; the impression therefore on our minds must correspond to this object, that is to say, it must be a moral impression, otherwise we do not understand it, and therefore cannot believe it. By *impression*, I never mean the *effect* which an object when understood produces on the mind; I mean simply the *conception* which the mind forms of the object, independent altogether of its influence on the character. These two things are distinct from each other, the one being the cause and the other the effect. In order then to a full belief of the Gospel, there must be an impression or conception on our mind, representing every moral quality, and every truth contained and embodied in the facts of the Gospel history; for the Gospel consists not in the facts, but in the meaning of the facts. We are not left to interpret the facts ourselves, but, along with the history of them, we have received the interpretation of them in the word of God. It is there written, "that God so loved the

“ world, as to give His only-begotten Son,
“ that whosoever believeth in him should
“ not perish, but have everlasting life.”
In order to understand and believe this,
it is not enough to believe that Jesus
Christ died on the cross for sinners. We
must receive impressions on our minds
corresponding to the circumstances of our
situation, which called for the interposition
of Divine compassion ; we are here describ-
ed as *perishing*. We may have the gene-
ral idea of perishing, in our minds, without
fear or concern, and we may have the idea
of others perishing, without being much
moved ; but it is impossible that a man can
be impressed with the fact of his being him-
self in a perishing state, under a just con-
demnation of eternal misery, without much
fear and concern. If then the Gospel im-
plies that we are in this condition ; and if
the value of the deliverance which it pro-
claims, rests on the truth of its statement
in this respect, we do not understand nor
believe the Gospel, unless we have on our
minds an impression corresponding to the
fact that this condition is our deserved
fate.

We must also receive on our minds impressions corresponding to a deliverance from this state. This impression will be joyful; for deliverance from misery means that which produces joy. If the Gospel contains tidings of deliverance for persons in our circumstances, we do not understand it unless there be on our minds, an impression corresponding to these glad tidings.

If this interposition on our behalf proceeded from holy love, on the part of God, we cannot understand the nature of the Gospel, unless we know both what holiness and love mean; and this we cannot know by mere description. We must have on our minds impressions corresponding to holiness and love, before we can believe in holy love. Had we no affections, the Gospel would be in vain proclaimed to us, because it is addressed to the affections, and without them we could not understand it. And when they are unexercised upon it, it comes to the same thing as if we were without them.

Is it then with my heart or affections that I believe the Gospel? No. No more than I believe colours with my eye. I can-

not understand or believe in colours without the information which has been received through my eye. Neither can I understand or believe in happiness, or misery, or moral qualities, except by means of the information which has been received through my affections. If I am told by a friend that he has lately seen a flower of a particular colour, to which he applies a name that I never heard of before, I cannot understand his information until he explains to me what colour he means, neither can I believe it although I have perfect confidence in his veracity. There is no impression on my mind corresponding to my friend's information, and so there can be no belief. And the case is the same with regard to the affections.

As to some it may appear that I am here opposing the word of revelation, it is necessary to observe, that in the Bible, the heart generally means the whole mind, and does not stand for the affections exclusively, as it does in our common language. In Romans x. 10. the internal reception of the truth is opposed to the external confession of it. The heart, in Rom. i. 21. evidently

means the understanding. We cannot become acquainted with any thing, except by the impressions which it makes upon us. And these impressions are made on our different senses, external and internal. As we know the taste of a substance by our palate, and its colour by our eye; so we know the joyfulness of an event, by the happiness which it produces in us, and the amiableness of an object by the love or admiration which we feel for it. Where the external sense is wanting, or diseased, or dormant, the information which we ought to receive from it is deficient; and where the internal sense is dormant or weak, there is either no impression received, or a deficient one. Our external senses come in contact with the external form of objects and actions, and our internal senses come in contact with their spirit and meaning. If we do not come in contact with the whole, we do not understand the whole; we receive only a partial impression, and that impression limits our belief.

A belief of the Gospel, then, comprehends, not only the impressions corresponding to the external facts of the history, but also

the impressions which correspond to all the moral qualities and conditions, therein attributed to God and man. If the Gospel was made known to us that it might conform our characters to the image of that God who is manifested in it, the perfection of our characters will depend on the perfection of the impression which we receive from the Gospel. And the perfection of that impression will depend on our coming in contact with every part of the Gospel; and we only come in full contact with it, when those affections which are addressed by it, are really excited by it.

SECTION III.

THE MODE IN WHICH MAN IS ADDRESSED
AND FAITH CALLED INTO ACTION BY
THE GOSPEL.

BUT can a corrupt mind receive any impression which may with fairness be said to represent the holy love of God? We cannot believe in holy love without knowing what it means; and how can a polluted heart acquire such an idea? Is faith in the Gospel a holy principle? Is it a new faculty? I would answer this question by another. Is the remembrance of the atonement, a holy principle or a new faculty? Both the belief and the memory are here exercised on a holy thing, the impressions to which they belong are received from a holy object, and that object has been presented to the heart by the Holy Spirit; but yet belief and memory are natural exercises of the mind, and are conversant with the things of earth as well as the things of heaven.

Conscience gives us an idea of sin, and the idea of sin enables us, in some measure,

to form a conception of its opposite, holiness. The corruption of man does not consist in his acquiring wrong faculties, nor does the renewal of man consist in his having new faculties bestowed on him. His corruption consists in the misdirection of his faculties, and his renewal consists in their being directed to their proper objects. Man, in his depravity, has all the faculties which a child of God has, in this life. And he has a natural ability to use these faculties as he will. The inability, therefore, of a polluted creature to receive an impression of holy love, is not a natural inability; if he would, he could; his inability is moral, it lies in the opposition of his will and affections, and this is his crime. How then does the Gospel enter the heart, for are not all hearts in this condition? The Father of the Spirits of all flesh was He who sent the Gospel; and His wisdom it was which fitted it for its work of regeneration. His Spirit operates on the heart, but He operates by means of an instrument well fitted for its end. The moral principles are indeed diseased, (though not extirpated, let it be remembered;) but man has other princi-

ples, and through these the Gospel may find an entrance to his heart and overcome that opposition of his will, which makes him unsusceptible of impressions from the holy love of God. It would be of no use to us if it addressed only unpolluted spirits. It is fitted for man in every condition. Its first address is to the very elements of our nature, to that instinct which seems common to us and the inferior animals,—self-preservation, and the desire of happiness.

This principle is a most powerful one. Joy and sorrow are mere expressions of self-love, and these are our ruling feelings, and maintain their sway most universally and constantly. They are the sources of our love and hatred, our hope and fear. We love and hope for that in which we find joy; we dislike, and avoid, and fear, that in which we find sorrow. These feelings exist, and are in exercise, in every mind; and the character depends on the objects by which they are excited.

The form in which the Gospel was announced by the angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem, marks its distinguishing characteristic to be joy, and points to these na-

tural instincts as the feelings to which it is addressed. "Behold," said the heavenly messenger, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." This message was dictated by Him who made the heart of man, and knew what was fitted to give it joy. It is therefore evident, that unless we see joy in the substance of the message, we do not understand it as God meant it, and therefore cannot believe it. We cannot believe that tidings are joyful to ourselves, unless we see that in them which excites our joy. The matter of joy lay in the birth of the Deliverer. That person had appeared on earth who, according to Daniel's prediction, was to make an end of sin, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness. If we are convinced that we are in a state of guilt and danger, or feel that we are unhappy, we cannot but consider the news of deliverance as tidings of great joy. But deliverance sounds poor to a man who does not feel that he requires it. The words of the message, it will be observed, do not merely refer to

the moral nature of the Gospel ; it addresses particularly the feelings of joy and sorrow.

Behold these feelings, and then contemplate the glorious character of God ; and let us join in praise to Him who hath condescended, through such obscure avenues, to introduce the light of that character into the soul of man. If the Gospel addressed merely our generous feelings, our love of what is right and excellent, our sense of what is beautiful and lovely, it would be a very different thing from what it is ; it would be suited to another order of beings, and, with regard to us, would scarcely be deserving the name of glad tidings. But, blessed be the name of our God—He hath addressed us in that character which cleaves closest to us—He hath spoken to us as base and polluted, but above all, as selfish beings. The very first principle which he addresses, is that of instinctive self-preservation. He meets the natural cry of misery, and the weary and undefined cravings of the unsatisfied spirit. His loudest and most general invitations, both in the Old and New Testaments, are addressed, not to the moral, but to the natural feelings ; to the sense of misery, and

the desire of happiness. "Ho, every one
 " that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,"
 Isaiah lv. 1. "Come unto me, all ye that
 " are weary and heavy laden, and I will give
 " you rest," Matt. xi. 28. Whosoever
 " will, let him take of the water of life free-
 " ly," Rev. xxii. 17. At this despised door
 of nature the Saviour knocks, and through
 it He deigns to enter. He came to bind up
 the broken heart, and to comfort all that
 mourn. And many come, as it seems, led
 by the mere instinctive longing after enjoy-
 ment, and try the Gospel as a last and for-
 lorn experiment, after the failure of every
 other attempt to obtain happiness. And,
 Oh, what an unlooked-for discovery do they
 make ! he who had found no resting-place
 in the world, and who had wandered through
 it in quest of some object, however insigni-
 ficant, that might interest him, and for a
 moment at least remove the sense of that
 hopeless languor which lay dead upon his
 heart, finds now an object which his widest
 desires cannot grasp, even filial communion
 with God here, and the full enjoyment of
 Him through a magnificent eternity, on the
 very threshold of which he already stands.

He who has felt himself too weak to resist the storms and roughnesses of life, learns to lean with confidence on Omnipotence. He whose conscience of sin has made life a burden to him, and at the same time has taught him to look with a vague horror to futurity, applies to that fountain which was opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness, and he has peace with God, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The joy of the Gospel, though it may be at first sought and embraced in gratification of natural instinct, contains in it the principles of the Christian character. At first it may appear mere deliverance from misery, and in this view it attracts the miserable; but as the means by which this deliverance was effected are seen, its moral power develops itself, and that Spirit whose unfelt influence led them here for comfort, opens the eyes of their understandings to discern the truth, and prepares their affections to receive it in the love of it.

Joy precedes love. We must take delight in an object before we can love it. We must take delight in God's gifts before we can know them to be benefits, or feel

grateful for them. We must take delight in his character before we can love Him. When we perceive that the safety and happiness of our souls for ever rest upon the character of God as manifested in the cross of Christ, we must take delight in that manifestation, and in the character so manifested ; and thus we learn to love them. When we see the faithfulness and justice of God, formerly so alarming to our guilty consciences, now not merely smiling on us, but actually becoming the foundation of assured hope through the satisfaction of the Saviour's blood, we must delight in them, and this delight will teach us love. This love and this delight will grow more and more disinterested. The glory of God will be contemplated with a rapture unmixed with selfish thoughts. "Thy loving kindness is better than life," says David, in the generous spirit of a child of God. Thy gifts are good and worthy of thyself, but still that love which bestowed them is far dearer to my heart than they—without that love even *thy* gifts would appear poor to me. The love of God produces likeness to God, and thus the joy of the Lord is the strength of his people.

It will be observed, that what I have already said on this subject, applies equally to those who were eye-witnesses of the events of the Saviour's life, and to those who have since heard or read the report of them. I am not speaking of the evidence on which the Gospel is believed, but on belief itself. We are too much accustomed in a loose way, to oppose faith and sight to each other, without considering what it is which is seen and what it is which is believed. Our eyes cannot see a meaning, nor can they see a moral principle, although they may see the action in which it is embodied. The disciples and companions of Christ when upon earth, were called upon to exercise faith, just as we are in the present time—and the same causes which hindered their faith, hinder ours. Their faith was exercised in receiving the interpretation of the events and actions which they witnessed. That interpretation consisted in the delineation of the moral government and character of God, and his judgment on the character of man. This was evidently addressed to their moral feelings; and the accuracy of the impression on their minds, and consequently

of their belief, depended entirely on the state of these feelings. If they had no such feelings at all, they could not believe at all. And in proportion to the strength and soundness of these moral feelings, would be the correctness of their understanding and their faith on the subject. It will thus appear, that their situation with regard to the reception of the Gospel did not differ much from our own. In both cases, that reception will be found to bear a certain proportion to the direction and the strength of the moral feelings.

There is a depth of ignorance and self deception in the wonder so often expressed at the infidelity of the Jews, which demands our serious consideration. They believed what they saw—they could not disbelieve it. They said, “This man doeth many miracles,”—but they did not believe the spirit and meaning of what the Saviour did, and that was the chief point. It may be thus, and it is thus with many now. Suppose that the outward senses of a man were made capable of receiving, and should actually receive an impression of that fact in the divine nature, which is called the doc-

trine of the Trinity,—that man might be in reality a Socinian with this impression fresh upon him, as readily as before it. The meaning and spirit of the doctrine, is that energy of holy love which restores a ruined world by the atonement of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Where this meaning is not perceived and felt, it matters little what name is taken. Socinianism may be virtually taught, where its name is denounced, and Trinitarianism may be most orthodoxly defended, where its spirit is unknown or unloved.

No, it is not the bare unexplained fact which is the object of Christian faith, nor is it any impression which can be made on the eye alone, that can bring us into communion with God. Our moral faculties must then be in right and healthful exercise, in order that we may have a correct belief of moral truths. Jesus saw in the vain-glorious feelings of the Jews, a bar to their belief of his doctrines ; “ How can ye believe,” says he, “ who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only ?” John v. 44. How often, in our intercourse with the world, do we hear it

said, “ that such a man cannot estimate the
 “ character of such another, that he cannot
 “ comprehend his feelings?” And it is so.
 There is great diversity in human characters and capacities. There is a fervour in the feelings of some, which colder spirits cannot conceive, and therefore cannot believe. Oh ! what then shall we say of the highest impression which man can have of the character of God ? What heart can conceive the fervour of that love wherewith he so loved the world, as to give for it His only-begotten Son ? What notions of sin, or of justice, have we, that can enable us to receive an adequate impression of the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ, in order that the pardon of man might be reconciled with the honour of God ? No created mind can receive a full impression of the Divine character,—the highest archangel cannot look on the cross of Christ, as God looks on it,—how much less can man, who is a worm ! Perfect faith in a history of high moral excellence, supposes moral faculties in a high state of power and exercise ; for no faculties except in that state are capable of receiving such an impression.

What then? Is faith the result of character, instead of being the cause and the former of character? It is both. The objects of faith do not create faculties in the mind, which had no previous existence there; but they call into action, and direct and strengthen those which they find there. The greatest variety of colours presented to a blind man cannot give him sight; but if they are presented to a man who sees, they will exercise his sight, and give him a power of discriminating their varieties, which is inconceivable to those who have not been trained to it. So also an estimable object presented to a mind destitute of moral feelings, cannot create esteem or love; but if the faculty be there, though in a weak and languid state from want of exercise, its proper object will in some measure excite and call it forth, and by exercise strengthen it. This is the only way of correcting and strengthening our faculties, either intellectual or moral. If they have been allowed to lie dormant, their exciting causes must be presented to them—if they have been active, but directed to wrong objects, they must be brought in contact with their pro-

per and legitimate objects. The impression made by these objects, may be at first very weak and imperfect, and such of necessity will also be the belief of them; but by exercise the faculties will gain their proper bent, and will increase in strength, and the faith which is attached to their impressions will keep pace with them.

How can a feeling which has a wrong direction be turned into its proper channel, except by having a proper exciting object presented to it? We cannot alter the course of a feeling, without presenting to it some other object more attractive. The superior attraction of this object may not at first be felt, but it will produce some effect; it will act at least as a disturbing force; it will shake the supremacy of the former object, and prepare the way for its own more cordial reception upon the next occasion.—Where we cannot but use mechanical force, the only way that we have of operating upon steel filings is by a magnet—and if they are detained by magnetic attraction in the place from which we wish to remove them, all that we can do, is to find out and apply a stronger magnet. The filings cannot be

addressed in any other way. So we cannot, as it were, lay hands upon our feelings, and force them in what directions we think fit; they do not feel any coercion of this kind: we must use magnetic influence; we must apply a more proper and a stronger exciting cause. The understanding of the true excellence of this new object increases by degrees as it is exercised, and faith along with it. Thus it was that "Abraham's faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect," James ii. 22. Abraham's faith in the character of God was different at last from what it was at first. Every view which had been given him of the Divine perfections, had tended to expand his capacities, to correct and strengthen his moral feelings, and thus to fit him for more true and more lively impressions of that character in future. As he grew in holiness, he could better understand the meaning and excellence of the Divine holiness; and as he grew in love, he could form more adequate conceptions of the Divine love. And thus would his faith be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The holy

love of God is the attribute most glorified in the atonement. This is the crown ; this gives its character to the whole work. The more polluted and depraved, therefore, a mind is, the less capable is it of understanding and believing the Gospel.

And yet the Gospel was sent into the world, that the polluted and depraved might be saved by the faith of it, both from the condemnation and the power of sin. And well is it fitted for their case. Even in the most polluted and the most depraved, there are feelings still remaining which, in the hour of sorrow or fear, may melt to the voice of kindness and compassion. There are in the store-house of Providence, events which will bring the stoutest heart to a stand, and force it to feel its weakness—and then the charge of guilt may refuse any longer to be despised, and the gracious invitations of an Almighty Father may not be disregarded. Besides, sin, though it misdirects, does not weaken self-love. Anguish, and doubt, and fear, and sorrow, and pain, enter the sinner's soul. And to these feelings are the glad tidings of the Gospel addressed.

All the parts of Divine truth are linked together, so that if one part is received, there is a preparation of heart for the rest. They are not united merely as parts of an intellectual system, though they have this union—they are united also by a sympathy between the feelings excited by the objects which the truth presents. Thus, if I believe that the sufferings and death of the incarnate Deity were required to expiate sin, and that he submitted to this for our sakes, my reason is prepared for the conclusion, no doubt, that sin is a very hateful and fearful thing; and this is the connection of the two doctrines as parts of an intellectual system. But there is still a far more important connection between the feelings produced by the two doctrines. If my mind is impressed by the love of Christ in dying for me, the sense of his overwhelming kindness and compassion will lay me low in the dust before him, and make me loathe myself, both as being the cause of his sufferings, and on account of the total inadequacy of my gratitude, in proportion to the favour bestowed on me. Even so also joy in the atonement, merely as the means of escape from misery,

is blessed by the Spirit of God, to bring forth the fruit of holy love, to the praise of the glory of his grace, in the hardest and the foulest heart. The joy of a free deliverance softens and expands the heart. It is thus prepared to look at the blood which was its ransom, with tenderness and gratitude—and thus is it led to rejoice in the love of Him whose blood was shed. There are many entrances, through which the Spirit introduces his powerful weapon, some of them to human reason more likely than others ; but where He works, there is success ; and without his influence, the most probable means fail. We only know so much concerning the nature of that influence, as may humble us, and keep us in a continual state of dependence on Divine aid. We see thus far, however, concerning the mode in which it is applied, that God works upon our minds by the operation of the truth on those natural faculties which he has bestowed on us.

The man who is continually exercising his faith in those truths which he knows, is daily becoming fitter to receive other truths : Whilst the man whose affections are direct-

ed to wrong objects, is daily becoming less susceptible of impressions from right objects, and is thus becoming more and more hardened in unbelief.

Let us suppose that an angel had been kept ignorant of the work of atonement until now, and that the Gospel were for the first time declared to him and to a hardened sinner together. Oh, what a difference would there be in their reception of it, and feelings from it ! With what humble and grateful rapture would that holy being welcome and embrace this new and glorious manifestation of his Father's character ! As he dwelt and fed upon it, he would sensibly grow in love, and holiness, and happiness. He would feel no difficulty, no doubt on the subject ; he would delight in God, with exceeding joy. And why would he be thus ready to receive it as soon as he heard it ? Because his affections had already been exercised by, and formed upon, other manifestations of the Divine character ; and though this last work excelled them in glory, yet it only carried into brighter display, principles which had already been adored and loved by the heavenly hosts.

The same affections with which, from his creation, he had regarded God, and which had been strengthened by continual exercise, are addressed by the Gospel; they are only called into more intense action; they are already tuned to this new song, only their pitch is lower. But what reception does the sinner give it? Let each of our hearts answer, how often, how obstinately, we have rejected it. The angel was happy before; this new discovery only makes an addition to a happiness which was already great: but we, whose lawful inheritance was eternal misery, and whose only hope of having the darkness of hell exchanged for the light of heaven, lay in this Gospel,—we hear it with carelessness and indifference, perhaps with scorn and indignation;—and even if it has pleased God, of his abundant compassion, to force upon us some sense of its excellency, Oh how indolent have we been in the enjoyment of it! how cold and forgetful in the expressions of our gratitude for it! And why does this happen? What is the explanation of this miserable and pitiable folly? Our affections have been so habitually directed to objects different from

and opposed to the character and will of God, that they scarcely feel the attraction of their proper objects when presented to them. There is, however, no other mode of recovery for a mind in that state, than the contemplation of these proper objects. If it feel its disease, it is prepared to receive the good tidings with joy, and to cry earnestly and importunately to Him, who can save, and will save, all who come to Him.

The affections of the angel's mind have been so habituated to excitement from their proper objects—the character of God, and his works and ways, as interpreted by Himself,—that they would feel no movement from the presence of an improper object. His heart is so full of God, that it rejects every thing opposed to Him: Whilst the hardened sinner's heart is scarcely stirred at all by the presence of a proper object for the affections, and is so full of self and sin, that it requires the hand of Omnipotence to force upon it the objects of eternity. The human mind is indeed so far like a mirror, that impressions can only be made upon it by corresponding objects,—and that no effort of ours, without the instrumentality of these

objects, can make the impressions ; but in this respect it differs from a mirror, that, by habit, it becomes increasingly susceptible of impressions from any class of objects. Observe the growth of avarice, of ambition, and of sensual indulgence. Minds long habituated to receive impressions from the objects of these disordered affections, seem at last to yield themselves entirely to them, and to refuse all other excitement. The view of this law of our moral being, has something very striking and awful in it. Every thought, every wish, every action, is making us more accessible either to the invitations of heaven or the temptations of hell. The movements of our minds may be forgotten by us, but they have left traces behind them, which may affect our eternal destiny. They do not terminate in themselves—in their own rectitude, or their own sin ; they have strengthened some principle, and weakened its opposite. Think whether that principle forms a part of the character of heaven or the character of hell. If it be a part of the character of heaven, an advance has been made in overcoming the enmity of the heart ; and if

it be a part of the character of hell, unbelief is more confirmed, because the mind is less open to impressions from the truth. The affections, when habitually misdirected, clothe the soul as with impenetrable armour against all assaults of the truth. It is this armour which Isaiah describes, when he predicts the rejection of Christ by the Jews : “ Make the heart of this people fat, “ and make their ears heavy, and shut their “ eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and “ hear with their ears, and convert and be “ healed,” Isaiah vi. 10. This passage is quoted in the New Testament by St. John, who attributes the unbelief of the people to the state of mind here described, John xii. 39, 40.

SECTION IV.

THE MUTUAL DEPENDANCE OF FAITH
AND SANCTIFICATION ON EACH OTHER
FOR GROWTH.

IT appears, then, that the belief of any one moral or spiritual truth operating on the mind, prepares it for the readier reception of any other, because it exercises the same class of affections, and thus increases their susceptibility of impressions from a farther revelation. It was to be expected, therefore, that those Jews who had received the truth communicated through their own dispensation, would welcome the doctrine of Christ; and that those who did not believe in the spiritual sense of their own Scriptures, would reject the true Messiah when he appeared. Thus Simeon and Anna, and those to whom she spoke, and John the Baptist, and all who understood and believed in the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom, believed in Jesus Christ—whilst those whose

affections had been unexercised by the spiritual character of God, and occupied by worldly expectations, were prepared to reject him. Our Lord seems to refer to this distinction in the 10th chapter of John. Those whose affections had been rightly exercised by the truth already revealed, knew the voice of Christ whenever they heard it. They were his sheep. They were prepared to receive him, not merely by their belief in the prophecies relating to him, but by having the temper of their minds harmonized to the spirit of his doctrine. In the 16th verse of the chapter, he may either allude to those in the Gentile world, who had, by the teaching of the Spirit, received that truth which is revealed in the works and ways of God, and in the testimony of conscience, and had thus been prepared for greater light; or to those in general beyond the Jewish boundary, whose hearts should afterwards be opened to attend to the Gospel. In Acts xiii. 48. there appears to be a reference made to the distinction above mentioned. The translation does not give the meaning of the original. We surely are not to suppose that all the Gentiles in

that place, who ever were to embrace the Gospel, did so at that time, and that their number was then summed and shut up. The spirit of the passage would require some such phrase as "bound towards," or "prepared for" eternal life, substituted in place of "ordained." The meaning seems to be this : Those of the Gentiles who, by attending the Jewish synagogue, had learned the doctrine of eternal life through an atonement, or who, without this advantage, had been convinced that they were sinners, and must be saved if saved at all, by free grace, embraced the Gospel whenever they heard it, as the development, and fulfilment, and harmonizing explanation of those truths which they had already partially received.

This view of the subject does not at all interfere with that most precious truth, that the work of Christ is a foundation of hope broad enough and strong enough for the chief of sinners, and that the spiritual medicine of the Gospel is adequate to the cure of the most desperate moral maladies. We daily see instances of the Gospel being pertinaciously rejected by those whose amiable

affections would lead us to anticipate for it a very different reception ; as we often find it embraced by those whose tone of mind seemed most averse to it. And we are hence taught to look to the great Disposer of hearts. But still there is a certain fitness in some minds for the reception of the Gospel, beyond what there is in others. Thus a conviction of sin naturally prepares the way to receive, with eagerness, the good news of forgiveness. A conviction of the insufficiency of this world to give permanent happiness, is certainly a preparation of mind for entertaining a higher hope. The explanation of this fact is, that in all such cases the truth has been *partially* received already ; and the affections exercised even by a fragment of the Divine will, are prepared to receive impressions from other manifestations of it. We may, with humble confidence, trust to the Divine promise, “ that those who seek shall find,” as an encouragement to us in our search after more spiritual light : and we may have this confidence confirmed, when we consider the provision which has been made in the constitution of our minds for its fulfilment.

The man who walks faithfully under the influence of one moral truth, becomes *necessarily* more qualified for receiving a farther measure of truth. For it is the will and appointment of God, that by faithful action, and the steady exercise of the affections, under the influence of known truth, our capacity for moral knowledge, and consequently for believing moral truth, should be expanded. No one is justified in sitting still, until he knows more. Let present duty be influenced by the truth which is at present known. But then it must be a *truth*; for otherwise the principles opposed to the Gospel are exercised and strengthened by it. A man who performs the external duties of life strictly, who is a liberal contributor to the necessities of others, and who attends Divine ordinances regularly, with the expectation expressed or understood of thus creating to himself a claim on the favour of God, and a plea for the pardon of past sins, is hourly strengthening a principle in the most direct opposition to the cross of Christ, and is hourly becoming more inaccessible to the glad tidings of salvation. It is quite ab-

surd to recommend to such a man to go on in his course, with the hope that his faithful walking will be rewarded by farther light. The farther he advances on that road, so much the deeper is he involved in condemnation and darkness, and the more unlikely is it that he will ever return.

The truths which *must* be received, with respect to man, are his guilt and helplessness ; and with respect to God, are his holiness and his mercy. The man who believes in these truths, perhaps has not the joy of the Gospel, but he believes in the elements of the Gospel ; and when his affections are exercised by them, they are exercised in conformity with the spirit of the Gospel. But the Gospel itself is as intelligible as these its elements, and as intelligible also as any precept in the moral law. Its address to our natural principle of self-preservation is surely simpler than any moral exhortation can be—and the manifestation of the love of God, and of his abhorrence of sin, in the cross of Christ, is surely as intelligible as the commandment to love God, or the declaration that “ cursed “ is every one who continueth not in all

“ the words of the law to do them.” Why then may not the Gospel be preached, as well as the law, upon any occasion? And why is it generally thought more advisable to teach children, and the weak, and the ignorant, rather to know their duties *out of the law*, than to love their duties *out of the Gospel*? There is something very inconsistent with reason in supposing, that abstract preceptive moral truths can be more intelligible, or more easily received, than the same moral truths when exemplified in the Gospel history. The same faculties qualify us for receiving impressions from both. There is, however, a difference in the impressions made in these two ways. The impression received from the *precept*, is necessarily a cold, and joyless, and lifeless impression, because its object addresses merely the sense of duty. Whilst the Gospel, not only addresses the sense of duty, but makes an irresistible appeal to every feeling of self-love, and every principle of gratitude and generosity. And let *this also* be remembered, that “ It is by grace we are saved, *through faith*.”

It is very possible that a man may be in a state of confirmed hardness, and darkness, and unbelief, and yet have what may appear to himself and his friends very clear views of the Gospel. It has been already frequently repeated, that although moral actions are truly understood and believed only when there is an impression on the mind significant of the moral principle contained in them, yet their external form can be believed and talked about, when their principle is not at all perceived. Thus the outward form of the facts of the Christian history may be believed implicitly ; and yet if the love of God is not perceived, and the freeness and undeservedness of the redemption through His Son,—the Gospel is not believed. But if actions are liable in this way to misinterpretation, words are even more so. A man may say that he believes the history of the Saviour, and that he receives it as a manifestation of the love of God, without being in the slightest degree hypocritical, and yet he may not be a believer. Love is a word symbolical of a particular state of feeling. A meaning, therefore, must be attached to it by every

individual corresponding to his own state of feeling. If his state of feeling is disordered, of course the meaning attached to this word will be a wrong one. But it often happens that we do not attach to our words even such meanings as our minds are capable of attaching to them. The meaning is perhaps a complex idea, and we cannot allow ourselves time to receive a full impression of it ; whereas the word is short and convenient, and perfectly answers all purposes of conversation or reasoning. We accordingly use the word, and leave the meaning for another occasion. Now, the Gospel is addressed not to our conversational or argumentative powers, but to our moral principles and natural feelings ; and therefore it is not really received, unless the impression of its moral meaning is actually made on the mind. And let each one think for himself, how often this blessed truth has passed over his mind, and has left behind it no more trace of holiness, than the foot of Christ did on the ground of Judea. Oh, the waters that proceed from this fountain are deadly waters, and many there are who drink thereat ! Philo-

sophical thinking minds are very apt, unconsciously, to fall into this error, especially such as fill the office of religious teachers, and most difficult it is to escape from its paralyzing habit and influence.

Who is there, even amongst serious thinkers, that does not often feel horrified at the lightness and unmovedness with which he can speak or write that name which represents the eternal Majesty of heaven, in conversation called religious, or in private study called theological ! Could indifference, or improper warmth, or a vain desire of victory, find place in a mind, to which the idea of such an object as God was really present ? Impossible—and yet how often are such feelings in the mind, when that word is in the mouth ! It is evident in such a case that the great *thing* is not believed at the time. What is the impression on the mind ? None corresponding to the mighty object assuredly ; the word only has impressed the mind as a logical datum. It is no doubt most convenient for the intercourse of life, and for the purposes of conversation and reasoning, to have such symbolical abbreviations to represent our

ideas ; but it is a dearly bought convenience, if it cheats us out of the reality of heaven, by enabling us to converse about it, without thinking or feeling what it is.

What wonderful love was that which brought Christ from heaven to earth to die for sinners ! Do we think of this wonder and feel it at all ? or when we speak of it even ? He is at this moment looking into our hearts. Oh what indifference he sees ! But I do not talk of gratitude ; I ask, is there in our minds even an *idea* of Christ's love every time that we speak its name ? Have we an impression corresponding to the fact, that had it not been for that love, we should all be within a few hours of eternal damnation ? Have we this impression when we speak of his atonement ?

Let the reader pause here and ask himself, how much of his religion is of this kind—how far his faith is conversant with words, and how far with things—how far it rests in mere symbols, and how far it embraces the spirit and meaning. What effect has your faith on your heart and conduct ? If your faith is conversant with the

true things of the Gospel, your heart will be growing in humble and holy peace, and your conduct in conformity to the whole will of God. If these effects do not result from your faith, look again at the Gospel, for you have not yet come in contact with it. A poor, ignorant, naked savage, who knows and feels so much as this, that he is a sinner, that God hates sin and yet has mercy on the sinner, knows and believes more of the Gospel, than the most acute and most orthodox theologian, whose heart has never been touched by the love of God.

No ; it is impossible really to have clear views of the Gospel, whilst the affections are muddy. What adequate impression can an impure mind have of the holy love of God ? Yet this is the chief attribute of God revealed in the Gospel. “ Blessed are “ the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The blessing here mentioned is not an arbitrary reward, irrespective of the character, to which it is promised. There is a connection between purity of heart and communion with God on earth, as well as the beatific vision hereafter. The purest

heart has the most correct faith, because it is susceptible of the truest impressions from holy love. It knows best what holy love means, and therefore it can believe best. Clear views of the Gospel do not consist in having our logical lines, all drawn accurately from premises to conclusion, but in having distinct and vivid impressions of the moral facts of the Gospel, in all their meaning, and all their importance, accompanied with the strong conviction of their independent reality.

But how is purity of heart to be attained? It can only be attained by faith, Acts xv. 9. So then, it may be answered, we cannot believe without purity of heart, and yet we can only have our hearts purified by believing. There is, however, no contradiction here. It is evident that we cannot believe in pure and holy love, unless we know what it is; and our knowledge of this must be proportioned to the purity and strength of our own feelings. And yet these feelings can only be purified and strengthened by being directed to pure objects, and by being much exercised by them. The Gospel is suited to man. He has

affections and principles corresponding to every address contained in it, although, from corruption and habitual misdirection, they may be, to a great degree, unmoved by these addresses. There is however, no other way of regenerating these misdirected affections, but by bringing them in contact with their proper objects. There is no other resource,—we have no other means of operating on them. They retain to the last somewhat of their natural susceptibility of impressions from their proper objects, and therefore they ought to be assailed through these objects. And we have seen that the first address of the Gospel is to a principle, which continues strong and vivacious in the midst of spiritual corruption and death, the instinctive desire of self-preservation and happiness. Whilst, therefore, it is vain to expect really clear views of Gospel truth in an unholy mind, it is equally hopeless to attempt the cultivation of holy affections in any other way than by exercising faith on the true character of God. These are two important errors, and their chief danger arises from their having so much of truth connected with them.

There is an aphorism quoted by that holy and heavenly-minded man, Archbishop Leighton, but from what author I do not recollect, which, under the form of paradox, contains most sober and valuable counsel : “ If you would have much faith, love much : “ and if you would have much love, believe “ much.” We cannot love unless we discern amiableness, and this we can only do by the light of love. There is no puzzle in this. Every day we see cases analogous to it in common life. A man whose stomach has been ruined by artificial and highly exciting food, has no appetite for plain wholesome nourishment, and yet the only way to recover his appetite, is to take this plain nourishment. This food has a natural suitability to his appetite, and this appetite has a natural desire after such food, although that desire, from habitual misdirection, feels little excitement from it. As he takes the food, however, his appetite gets better, and as his appetite gets better, he takes more food. Thus the food and the appetite act and react upon each other, till the man’s health is restored. Even so

a diseased soul has no appetite for the truths of the Gospel, and yet nothing but that truth can restore it to health. As the soul improves in health, its desire after its proper food increases; that medicinal food gives additional health to the spiritual system, and this additional health is accompanied by an increase of desire after the truth.

Clear views of the character of God can exist only in minds whose affections are pure and strong, and properly directed; and in perfect consistency with this, and as deeply rooted in the necessity of things, is the fact, that the affections can only be purified and strengthened, and rightly directed, by being brought in contact with the truth. Thus perfect faith supposes perfect sanctification, and perfect sanctification supposes perfect faith. What else is the meaning of a holy mind, than that it delights in and feeds on holy things? They are wrong who suppose, that the sanctification of a soul consists simply in the truth's abiding in it—and they also are wrong who suppose that a soul can be sanctified by any other means. An unholy soul has lit-

the susceptibility of impressions from holy objects ; and although they have a natural suitableness to its affections, yet it is scarcely moved or stirred, when in contact with them, and when absent from them, feels no desire after them. Whereas a holy soul, in their absence, longs after them, and in their presence is increasingly susceptible of impressions from them ; and is at the same time increasingly unsusceptible of impressions from their opposites.

This sanctification of the heart is evidently a progressive work, but the progress may be more or less rapid in different persons. One may advance more in an hour than another in a long life. An indolent application to the truth can produce but little sanctification, and so faith cannot increase. An admission of impressions from improper objects, deadens the affections towards the truth, and so faith retrogrades. Wilful sin blinds the understanding, and confirms the affections in their wrong bent, and in their insensibility to the Gospel, and so faith seems to die. The mercy of God, by the visitations of providence and the strivings of the Spirit, may keep the spark from

utter extinction ; but there is little progress made, little conformity to the will of God, and little enjoyment of his presence and favour. But when a man feels his danger, and perceives the necessity of salvation in its full urgency, he is prepared to yield to the Gospel mould ; he is convinced that his eternal all rests on this truth ; he therefore clings to it, and the closeness of his grasp insures the depth and truth of the impression on his heart.

We may believe that the spirit of an infant early removed from this world, a trophy of the cross, and carried to heaven, will be at once impressed by the beauties and glories of the Divine character, and conformed to the same image by the knowledge of Him who is the spirit and meaning of the Gospel. But even in heaven there must be a progressive advancement. Greater knowledge of God will produce greater resemblance to him, and greater resemblance to him will increase the capacity of knowing him. It is the same on earth. A free and general pardon is proclaimed from heaven to the sinful children of men ; but it is conveyed through the blood of atonement, a

channel which displays all the perfections of God. The heart of man is naturally opposed to the holiness of the Divine character; and therefore until that character is seen to be in truth our only safety, our only sure happiness for time and eternity, we reject the proclamation. As soon, however, as we feel our danger and misery, and see the safety, and happiness guaranteed in the Divine character, as displayed in the cross of Christ, we listen to the proclamation with joy, and we come at the same time under the shade of its protection, and under the operation of its sanctifying power. And then the work of grace advances, just in proportion to the earnestness and constancy with which we cleave to and abide in the truth.

We see, then, that as the mind dwells on this great theme, and as the affections are more exercised by its wonders, there will be a gradual dilatation of the whole moral system—that lighter and feebler impressions will give place to deeper and stronger—that the external symbols of words and actions will become more and more identified with the mighty realities of God and eternity—that religion, instead of being an interrupted

seeking after God, will become an unbroken communion with him, a conformity to his image, and a participation of his joy. The lower orders of intelligent beings will thus be gradually pressing upwards in the scale of spiritual excellence, and filling the places which have been just left by the higher—and the whole family of God, led by this glorious light, will through eternity be advancing nearer to their Father.

SECTION V.

THE DESIGN OF FAITH.

WE shall be saved from much perplexity and error in our inquiries into the nature and exercise of faith, by keeping in mind what is its design or end. We are not commanded to believe merely for the sake of believing, or to show our ready submission to the will of God ; but because the objects which are revealed to us for our belief, have a natural tendency to produce a most important and blessed change on our happiness and our characters. Every object which is believed by us operates on our characters according to its own nature. If, therefore, we have taken a wrong view of revelation, that wrong view will operate upon us, and produce a bad effect on our characters. This shows the importance of a correct knowledge of the truth contained in revelation.

A man's character is formed by his habitual impressions or prevalent objects of thought and feeling. Let us suppose a person of good natural affections to have his mind occupied continually by the history of an injurious fraud which he believes to have been practised against him on some occasion. It is impossible that he can escape being miserable, and becoming morally depraved. His bad passions, by being constantly excited, must grow in strength and in susceptibility of similar impressions, and his happier affections, by being unexercised, must fade and die. Let us again suppose a man with less amiable natural qualities, whose life or fortune had been at one time saved by the self-sacrificing generosity of a friend. If this event makes such an impression on him, as to be more present to his thoughts than any other, it cannot fail of softening and improving his character, and increasing his happiness. His good affections are thus continually exercised, and must, therefore, be continually gaining strength, whilst bad passions are at the same time displaced. Of those who have acquired the character of misanthropes, pro-

bably nine out of ten have, like Timon, been men of generous dispositions, who, having been deceived in friendship, have ever after looked on fair professions as the symbols of dishonest intentions. Their feelings of contempt and hatred, and wounded pride, being thus continually exercised by this unfortunate belief, the whole frame of their character has been ruined, and their peace of mind destroyed. And it is possible that, if we could look into the hearts of men, and trace their history, we might find some of the brightest examples of benevolence amongst those whose natural dispositions were most opposite to it, but who had allowed the history of the Redeemer's love so to abide in them, that it had softened and changed their hearts, and healed their diseased affections.

Any circumstance to which we attach much importance, is naturally much present to our minds. And on this point there is as great room for deception as on any other. I have perhaps been unfortunate, or I have been injured, and I am distressed by it: but is this matter really of that importance which it assumes in my mind? I may have

been correctly informed in all the particulars of this injury, which has been committed against me. I may not over-rate the malice, or the fraud, or the baseness of the perpetrators. I therefore do not believe so far what is false. Yet I may attach a false importance to it. I may think it more momentous than it really is; and then neither can my impression of the act be a just impression, nor my belief of it a correct belief. This is a question which we have often occasion to ask ourselves in the course of this world's events, and this is a judgment and a conclusion to which unbiassed reason must often conduct us. But when we come to speak of eternal things, the question must be put in another form. Do I attach to this matter the importance which really belongs to it? Its importance I cannot but admit to be infinite; my all depends upon it for ever; and yet it takes but slight hold of my mind. Surely then I do not understand its importance; and if so, I cannot believe its importance. I do not believe the thing as it is.

Our minds then, receive an influence from every thing by which they are occupied,

and according to the degree in which they are occupied by it, and this degree is determined by the importance which our feelings attribute to it. If then the importance of the Gospel is believed, it will occupy the mind much; and if it does so, it will keep the affections in healthy exercise, and a right direction. If it does not occupy our minds, its importance is not seen, and therefore its real nature is not believed. But objects assume importance in our minds, according to the relation which they bear to the general bent of our affections. Thus any event which promises either to increase or diminish his wealth, assumes great importance in the mind of an avaricious man.—The small importance, therefore, which is often attached to the Gospel, by those who may even have heard and read much about it, and profess to believe in it, arises from the circumstance of their affections having an opposite bent. There is something in the Gospel, and in the holy character of Him whose message it is, from which they shrink. No doubt this proceeds from their ignorance that happiness is a quality of holiness; but this ignorance is not a guiltless

ignorance, nor is the unbelief connected with it a guiltless unbelief. They are the consequences of unholiness of heart. An unholy heart hates holiness, and *therefore* is blind to its excellence, and will not believe that happiness is inseparable from it. Our unbelief of the Gospel, then, and of its importance, ought not to be regarded as an act for which we can never be morally accountable, nor should it be spoken of as a mere misfortune. There is a moral guilt attached to it. It arises from a discordance between the moral state of our minds, and the character of God which is exhibited in the Gospel. It arises from the depravity of our affections. And this depravity it is which makes the work of the Spirit necessary. The things concerning Christ must be taken by the Spirit and shewn to the heart, and brought in contact with the affections, and kept there, before their inestimable preciousness can be felt or believed. But this depravity of our affections, and our absolute need of Divine assistance, are no excuses for unbelief. Sin consists in this depravity. If a man were guiltless because he acted under the in-

fluence of a strong and overbearing moral depravity, then the more depraved we were, the less guilty we should be. There is a great difference between moral necessity and natural necessity. We never say that a blind man ought to see, because we know that he lies under a natural inability ; but we say that an unfeeling man ought to feel, and that an implacable man ought to forgive and forget injuries, because he lies under no natural disability to do so, but only under the moral disability of his own corrupt heart, which is the very thing which constitutes his culpability. God loves right so perfectly, that he cannot sin ; he lies under the necessity of his own moral attributes to do always what is good, and in this moral necessity does his infinite excellence consist. A sinner loves sin so well, that he cannot but sin : and in this moral necessity does his culpability consist. This moral necessity to evil is formed by the misdirection of the affections, and it becomes stronger and stronger by every act in subordination to it. It is the mark of perdition upon the soul. But how is this fearful barrier to be broken down ? By no

other means is it possible, but by bringing the affections into contact with the high and holy objects of eternity. This is the true philosopher's stone, which converts the iron fetters of sin into a golden chain of love, binding the heart to God and heaven. The most hardened sinner has yet some conscience left. He knows that all is not quite right, and hence he has occasional fears that all is not quite safe. This sense of sin, and these fears, if he allows them to operate on his mind, would lead him to the Gospel, and there would he find a cure. Every man can judge tolerably well for another, how he ought to act or feel in particular circumstances ; and this same judgment must sometimes take cognizance of his own conduct and feelings. Even that very self-love which so often gives a wrong direction to our conduct, shows us what is due to others, by its demands in our own favour.

Moral ignorance, therefore, is never innocent ; though it is more or less aggravated according to the opportunities of moral knowledge which have been neglected. A man who rejects the Gospel when it is presented to him in its truth and simplici-

ty, is in a very different situation from a man who has either never heard it at all, or has heard it accompanied by absurd superstitions. The one has fairly been confronted by a message of holy love, and what he cannot help suspecting to have some strong claim upon his attention and regards, and he has turned his back upon it. This of course gives an additional firmness and acrimony to the opposition which his mind feels for it. Its presence in some degree rebuked him, and this he cannot suffer without irritation. The others, who never heard the Gospel at all, or never heard it intelligibly, cannot have the same acrimony of opposition to it. Besides, they may have learned, perhaps, by the teaching of the Spirit, that truth concerning the Divine character which is revealed in the testimony of conscience, and in the works of creation and providence; and in this case they would receive the Gospel if they heard it; for *true natural religion is elementary Christianity*.

The perception then of the importance of the Gospel is not only essential to the correctness of our knowledge and belief of

it, but it is necessary also in order to the accomplishment of its great design in our hearts. Unless the truth is much present to our affections, unless it abides in us, it cannot influence our characters. And unless we feel its importance, it will not abide in us. That Christianity is not worthy of the name, which just chooses a particular day in the week, or a particular hour in the day, for itself, and leaves the rest of the time and the duties of life to the influence of other principles. It ought to be in us, as a well of water springing up unto eternal life; its joy, its hope, its love, should be ever cheering the heart, purifying the affections, and stimulating the conduct. It ought to be the root, from which the duties of life, in all their branches, should derive their life and vigour. The great truths of revelation should be ever present with us, that we may be assimilated to their principles, and preserved from opposite impressions. We are invited to walk with God, to walk in the light of his countenance, to take him for our portion, and hiding-place, and exceeding joy, and under the shadow of his wings to make our refuge until all calami-

ties be overpast. He has been pleased to illustrate his relation to us by all the most endearing ties of nature, that we may more easily and constantly realize his presence. He has presented himself even to our senses, clothed in our nature, walking and conversing as a man amongst men, fulfilling all the offices and suffering all the sorrows of life, that we might think of him not only without terror and strangeness, but even with respectful confidence and intimacy. In the work of atonement, he has given a tangible form to the high attributes of Deity—he has made them there stand forth before our eyes in the substantial reality of living action, and at the same time in all their grandeur and loveliness,—he has rendered them intelligible to our understandings, without lowering their dignity,—he has fitted them to address the feelings of human nature, whilst they call forth the praise and the rapture of angels who surround the throne. And in the language of his word, in its rich and beautiful variety of parables, and allegories, and poetical allusions, what is the object in nature, which has not been employed to explain

and illustrate his truth? He has thus, so to speak, written his name upon every thing that surrounds us. And are they not all his works? Ought they not to declare his glory? God hath thus enveloped us with his glory,—he hath made himself our dwelling-place—and all this, that our thoughts and our affections may rest upon Him, that we may feed upon his love, that we may be conformed to his likeness, and that we may enter into his joy. And is it possible for us, in such circumstances, to forget God? He even embitters other things, that we may be drawn to himself—he takes away an earthly friend, that we may be led to a Friend from whom nothing can separate us,—our hopes are blasted here, that we may learn to plant them in a soil where nothing dies—he arms sin with remorse, that we may be persuaded that it is a bitter thing to depart from God.

If it were possible to believe in the Gospel without remembering it, such faith would be of no use; but the belief of its importance fixes it in the heart. The moral effects of it on the character, constitute the great reason of its being urged on our belief. We are not to think

that pardon is created by believing the Gospel, as if faith were the ground of forgiveness. No ; the Gospel itself is the proclamation of pardon through the perfect atonement of Christ, and it is the belief of the all-sufficiency of this proclaimed ground of pardon remaining in the memory, and operating on the heart, which makes meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. The apostle Peter, accordingly, in his second epistle, stirs up the pure minds of Christians by way of remembrance, and presses upon their attention truths with which he knew they were acquainted. In the 9th verse of the 1st chapter, he ascribes the deficiency in Christian virtues and graces, to a forgetfulness of the atonement, that great work in the belief of which they had before found deliverance from guilt. “ He “ that lacks these things is blind, shutting “ his eyes, and forgetting that by which he “ was formerly washed from his sins.” The knowledge of the atonement it was, which first produced these qualities in the heart, and it is the continued remembrance of the atonement which alone can keep them in life, and strengthen and expand them. All

things pertaining to life and godliness, he says, are given to us in the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue. And hence, when we forget him, we lose the things which pertain to life and godliness.

It may be proper here to give a more extended illustration from scripture of the sanctifying influence of the truth, as the end and design of faith. According to the scriptures, moral obedience is produced not by a knowledge of the law, but by faith in the Gospel. And for this end has the Gospel been revealed and faith in it been required. In the Epistle to Titus, ii. 11. it is said, that “the grace or forgiving mercy of God, that bringeth salvation or a cure, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” Now the forgiving mercy of God is not a precept; it does not produce these effects by authority, but by its natural influence it moulds the character into this form. But it can only do so whilst it is remembered. In the next chapter of the

same Epistle, Paul exhorts Titus to inculcate upon the Cretans an attention to the relative duties of life ; and then, as if to remove his despondency of success, he reminds him, that all the most advanced Christians had been themselves but a short time before in a state of enmity to God and man, and that they had been delivered from this state only by the knowledge of the kindness and love of God our Saviour. Then, in the 8th verse, “ This is a faithful saying,” and these doctrines (of free grace, contained in the four preceding verses) “ I will that thou affirm constantly, “ in order that they who have believed God “ in this matter, may be careful to maintain good works ;” or, in order that the same good effects which have been produced in us by the belief of this Gospel, may also be produced in them. “ These “ doctrines are good and profitable in their “ effects on the characters of men. But “ avoid doctrines of a different description, “ foolish questions and genealogies, and “ contentions and strivings about the law ; “ for they are unprofitable and vain ; they “ can have no salutary effect upon the

“character.” In our English translation, “these things,” in the last clause of the 8th verse, seem to refer to the good works mentioned immediately before; but this sense is not consistent with the context. The “good and profitable” things of the 8th verse, are opposed evidently to the “unprofitable and vain” things of the following verse. And what are these unprofitable and vain things? Not *bad works*, which they must have been, had the other been *good works*; but foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions and strivings about the law; all of them disputes about doctrine, which indicates that the other things are doctrines also, but differing from them in their tendency and importance. Besides, the tenor of the Apostle’s reasoning through the chapter requires this interpretation. Titus was appointed to labour among a people, in whom there were many things to be reprehended and “rebuked sharply.” But in the midst of these discouragements, Paul cheers him by displaying the power and efficacy of that Gospel which he was commissioned to teach. He reminds him of their own for-

mer state and character, and of the change which had been produced in them, by the knowledge of the free grace of God through Christ Jesus. “ Knowing then and feeling that it was this great truth alone which made you a friend and a servant of God, from being his enemy, cease not continually to inculcate it upon the Cretans, and be assured that wherever it is received it will produce the same effects. It is the confidence which I have in its salutary tendency, which makes me prize it, and preach it, and urge others to preach it. And it is the conviction, that disputes about the observance of Jewish rites, and speculative and unpractical arguments upon religious subjects, cannot, in the nature of things, produce any good effects upon the character; which makes me avoid them myself, and desirous that you should do so too. If I thought that such questions could purify the heart, I should propose them in every assembly; but their tendency is to irritate and darken, and not, like the doctrine of the cross, to enlighten, and purify, and tranquillize.”

SECTION VI.

THE DESIGN OF FAITH CONSIDERED AS A
TEST OF THE CORRECTNESS OF FAITH.

WE have thus a simple scriptural test, by which we may try all the views and interpretations of Christian doctrine. Are they good and profitable in their influence on the heart and conduct? If they have not this tendency, if the impressions naturally made by them are not of this description, we may be assured that we have mistaken the doctrine.

Thus, if the view which we take of the doctrine of election, or a particular providence, be such a one as leads us to be negligent in our callings, or to consider ourselves free from moral responsibility, we may be sure that this is a wrong view, because it cannot be good or profitable to the characters of men.

The doctrine of election is just another name for the doctrine of free grace. It teaches that all men are under deserved condemnation, and therefore can have no claim on God for pardon ; and that this, and all other mercies, are the gifts of his *own free bounty and choice*. It thus teaches us humility and gratitude, by impressing us with the conviction that we are debtors to God's unmerited bounty, not only for the gift of Christ and the knowledge of it, but also for the influence of the Spirit which inclines our hearts to accept it.

The doctrine of a particular providence teaches, that the same God who gave his Son to save us, orders every event in our lot. The belief of this will dispel worldly fears and anxieties, and inspire confidence, and impress with a continued sense of the Divine presence : and far from producing carelessness, or recklessness with regard to the duties and the circumstances of life, it will draw forth the most attentive, and sensitive, and humble vigilance ; for it discovers to us the finger of God in every thing, small or great, sorrowful or joyful.

It is possible that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints should be so perverted by the corruption of human nature, as to lead to indolent security and unwatchful habits. But this is not the doctrine as stated in the Bible. The true doctrine is, that as it was God who first opened the eyes of sinners to the glory of the truth, so their continuance in the truth requires and receives the same almighty support to maintain it. It is not in their title to heaven, as distinct from the path to heaven, that they are maintained, and persevere. No; they "are kept by the power of God, *through faith* unto "salvation." This doctrine then really leads to humble dependence on God, as the only support of our weakness; and to vigilance, from the knowledge that, when we are not actually living by faith, we are out of that way, in which believers are kept by the power of God unto salvation. The reality of our faith is proved only by our perseverance; if we do not persevere, we are not saints.

Any view of the doctrine of the atonement which can make us fearless or careless of sinning must be a wrong view, be-

cause it is not good nor profitable to men. That blessed doctrine declares sin pardoned, not because it is overlooked or winked at, but because the weight of its condemnation has been sustained on our behalf by our elder Brother and Representative. This makes sin hateful, by connecting it with the blood of our best Friend.

There are many persons who may be said rather to believe in an ecclesiastical polity, than in the doctrines of the Bible. In such cases the impression must be similar to that which is produced by political partizanship in the governments of this world. And there are some whose faith extends to higher things, who yet attach too much weight to externals.

Any view of subjects that may be believed or disbelieved without affecting our faith in the atonement, which can produce a coldness or unkindness between those who rest on the atonement, and live by the faith of it, must be a wrong view, because it mars that character of love which Christ declares to be the badge of his people. Such a view interferes with the doctrine of the atonement. Love to Christ, as the exclusive

hope and the compassionate all-sufficient friend of lost sinners, is the life-blood of the Christian family ; and wherever it flows, it carries along with it, relationship to Christ, and a claim on the affection of those who call themselves his. What is a name or a sect, that it should divide those who are to live together in heaven through eternity, and who here love the same Lord, and who have been washed in the same blood, and drink of the same river of the water of life, and have access through the same Mediator by the same Spirit unto the Father ! This is a very serious consideration. It touches on that final sentence which shall be pronounced on the sheep and the goats : “ Come, ye blessed ;” why blessed ? “ In as much as ye did it to one of the least of these *my brethren*, ye did it unto *me*.” “ Depart, ye cursed ;” and why cursed ? “ In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of *these*, ye did it not to me.” It is not a general benevolence that is talked of here ; no, it is love to Christ exerting itself in kindness, and acts of kindness to his brethren for his sake. This is the grand and pre-eminently blessed feature of the Christ-

ian character. Its presence, is the seal of heaven on the soul ; its absence, is the exclusion from heaven. We should take heed to ourselves ; for any flaw in this respect marks a corresponding flaw in our Christian faith. The importance of the blood of Christ is not rightly perceived, if it does not quench these petty animosities. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. An undue importance attached to inferior points is surely not good or profitable to men.

We take a wrong view of the Gospel if we suppose that any moral qualifications whatever are required on our part, to entitle us to believe on Christ unto salvation. No one, it is true, will ask supply without a sense of need ; that is not however, a necessary qualification, but an exciting cause. A man will not ask for food unless he feels hungry, but he *has full liberty* to ask it without feeling hungry. So also no one will look to Christ for happiness, unless he is in some degree sensible of wretchedness ; nor for pardon, unless he is in some degree convinced of his guilt. But these are only exciting causes, not *entitling qualifications*. In the same way,

no one will come without the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit ; but this is not a necessary qualification either, but only an exciting cause. That is to say, no one is commanded to delay believing on Christ, until he is influenced by the Spirit ; on the contrary, the command to repent and believe the Gospel is universal, and calls for immediate obedience, which proves that it is in the natural power of all men to do so, and that their inability is a moral, and therefore a criminal inability. The ground on which pardon is proclaimed through Christ, is a thing independent altogether of our believing in it, because it is firm and sufficient in itself whether we believe in it or not. The sentence has been already executed on the Surety, and the prison-door has been thrown open ; but if we refuse to come out, we exclude ourselves from the benefit of it. The Sun of mercy is risen with healing in his beams, but if we will not open our eyes, we may not know that he is risen, and thus we may exclude ourselves from the light of life. As soon, however, as we open our eyes, we know that it is light ; and as soon as we understand and believe the Gospel, we know that we

are pardoned : I mean, when the truth is clearly understood and firmly believed, and when its native influence is not prevented by bodily disease, or the perplexing influence of human systems. The first scriptural consolation received by the believer, arises from his conviction that the Gospel itself is true, and the measure of his comfort corresponds with the strength and steadiness of his faith. Such is the nature of this revelation, that he who is taught its true glory must be convinced that God would neither have proclaimed it to the world nor have done the great thing that is made known in it, had he not designed to save all who come to the knowledge of it. The declaration of heaven, that he who believes shall be saved, confirms this view of the grand object of the work of the Saviour ; but even without such a declaration, the man who, conscious of sin and misery, really believed that God had become man, and had suffered sorrow and death that the sinful and miserable might be saved, could not doubt of the abundant mercy of God, nor of his own salvation. After such an act of love, the wonder is that any should be lost, and not that the unworthy should

be saved. Many clog the freeness of the Gospel, from the fear of antinomianism ; but this is itself a most dangerous species of antinomianism. The law of God is written in the heart by no other instrument but the free mercy of the Gospel. The pardon has been proclaimed simply, in order that the power and influence of sin may be overcome ; we are therefore falsifying the record, and undoing its purpose, if we teach men to cast off their sins as a preparatory work previous to believing, and in order that they may accept of the pardon. The command to “ Repent and believe,” means nothing more than that we should change our former views for those which the Gospel presents to us. Repentance means a change of mind, and therefore it necessarily accompanies a new belief. When we take new views, we *must* make a change, *we must* leave our old ones. We may say, “ Arise “ and depart,” though we know that the person cannot depart without arising. But the real sorrow of the heart, on account of sin, can arise only from the sense of the amazing contrast between the subduing and overwhelming mercy of God and our

unworthiness. It is when we look on him whom we have pierced, that we mourn truly; and it is when we know that God is pacified towards us, for all that we have done, that we remember and are confounded, Zech. xii. 10. Ezek. xvi. 63. When the Lord said to Peter, "Lovest thou me?" he could answer that he did, and could appeal to his knowledge of the secrets of the heart for the truth of what he said; and it was this love which made him weep bitterly, when his Master's eye caught his, after he had denied him. We may, without faith in Christ, regard the consequences of sin with dislike and apprehension; and we may even feel it to be a pollution to the dignity of our nature; but our hearts can never loathe it for its own sake, until we see it connected with the blood of him who loved us and gave himself for us. It is not health, but disease, that we carry to the physician; and it is not any moral good, but sin and sorrow, that we must carry to the Saviour. It seems to have been the purpose of God, in adapting the first appeal of the Gospel to the mere natural sense of misery, and the instinctive craving after

happiness, to make it impossible to attach any merit to faith, beyond what is attached to the desire a child feels for his mother's milk.

The absolute freeness of grace must be preached, in order to make the Gospel good and profitable to men. If man is required to bring any thing to the Saviour, he is not utterly lost, he has something to bring ; or, in other words, sin is not so very sinful, and man hath whereof to glory even before God. The more freely grace is proclaimed, the more deeply sin is condemned ; and it is the belief of having much forgiven, that compels the heart to love much. Love therefore, which is the fulfilling of the law, has its source in free grace. Oh the presumptuous vanity of men, who would dream of inventing a defence for the interests of holiness, better and securer than that which God himself has appointed ! That very parable which I have quoted from the conclusion of the 7th chapter of Luke, is answer sufficient to all objections against the doctrine of grace, in point both of fact and of argument. This is a position which cannot be pressed too much. It is no less

strong in reason than in revelation, and its wisdom is as demonstrable on the acknowledged principles of the human mind, as the fact of its existence in the Bible is demonstrable on the acknowledged principles of fair interpretation.

It is possible to believe not only in the facts, but also in the system of Christianity as a philosophical theory, and yet be destitute of faith in the truth. There is something very striking in the relative suitability which exists between the susceptibility of the human mind to receive certain impressions, and the power of Christian truth to make an impression; and it is conceivable that a man may be captivated by this intellectual and moral harmony, and take much pleasure in tracing it through all its detail, and yet derive no more profit from it, than from the examination of any curious piece of material mechanism. This can be easily explained. The object of his belief is not the Gospel itself, but the adaptation of the Gospel to its purpose. This is the shape which the idea of the Gospel assumes in his mind, and from this he derives his impression of it. He avows his belief of the facts contained in the sa-

cred history, and he distinctly perceives the moral qualities manifested in them ; but he does not consider them as things existing by themselves, and independent of all human reasoning upon them. He is occupied by the metaphysics of religion as the formalist is occupied by the ceremonies. He considers the facts and principles of revelation simply in their philosophical relation to those feelings which they address in human nature ; he is therefore impressed, not with the condescending goodness of God, but with the skill which appears in the adaptation of the manifestation of that goodness to the moral defects of man.

A philosophical critic would have had much delight in remarking the skill with which Demosthenes selected his topics and arguments, so as to excite those feelings in his audience which were favourable to his own cause ; but this philosophical delight left his passions unmoved, and his conduct uninfluenced. It was the orator's wish to gain his cause, and this he could only do by moving the affections and convincing the judgment of the Athenians. But the affections could not be moved, nor

the judgment convinced, unless his statements and arguments were received as substantial truth in themselves, altogether independent of philosophical relation and harmony. Had he delivered a critical analysis of his famous oration for the crown, instead of the oration itself, it is probable that he, and not Eschines, would have been exiled. It is proper that this beautiful relation should be seen and admired ; but if it comes to be the prominent object of belief, the great truth of Christianity is not believed. A teacher of religion, who should fill his discourses with the delineation of this relation, might be a very entertaining and interesting preacher, but it is probable that he would not make many converts to Christianity. Our affections are excited by having corresponding objects presented to them, not by observing that there does exist such a relation between the affections and their objects. A man under the sentence of death may well and naturally rejoice when he hears that he is pardoned ; but it will be no consolation to him to be informed, that there is a natural connection between receiving a pardon in such circum-

stances, and rejoicing. As the blood flowed no better through Harvey's veins than it does through the veins of many who never heard of the theory of circulation; so an acquaintance with the relation which subsists between moral impressions and their exciting causes does not give the philosopher any advantage, in point of moral susceptibility, over the peasant who never heard of such a relation.

As it is possible to believe in the philosophy of the Bible, without believing in its substantial truth; it is also possible to believe in its poetry, without any saving consequences. There is much high poetry in the Bible. There is a sublime in the God set forth in it, altogether unrivalled; there is a strange and beautiful combination of overwhelming omnipotence, and the sweetest tenderness; there is an intimacy of union and endearment spoken of between this God and his creatures, which, when stript of all that is offensive to nature, may take a strong hold of the imaginative faculties, and give a high species of enjoyment to the mind. But the most important part of religion in relation to sinners is not

poetical, and that is its necessity. The Gospel has not been revealed that we may have the pleasure of feeling or expressing fine sentiments, but that we may be saved. Peter knew this well, when, in reply to his Master's question, "will ye also go away?" he said, "Lord, to whom can we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." He makes no expressions of generous devotedness,—he knows that he is paying no compliment,—no, it was absolute necessity that bound him to his Saviour. The taste may receive the impression of the beauty and sublimity of the Bible, and the nervous system may have received the impression of the tenderness of its tone, and yet its meaning—its deliverance—its mystery of holy love, may remain unknown. Alas, that a pleasing reverie should ever be mistaken for the counterpart of the Divine character in the heart of man! The person whom I am supposing, believes in the simplicity, and beauty, and awful magnificence, of the revealed system of religion, and in the touching propriety of the form under which it has been communicated. But he does not understand it as a thing on which the alterna-

tive of his own happiness or misery through eternity depends. He does not understand it as exhibiting to him the character of that Being who deals out to him every breath that he draws, and appoints for him every event which he meets in the race of his existence ; who surrounds him continually, and from whose enveloping presence he can never retire himself for an instant through eternity ; who marks every passing thought and dawning desire, and who will for all these bring him one day into judgment ; he does not understand the Gospel as a message from heaven, inviting him, through the atonement of Christ, to approach this great Being as a gracious Father, from whose love nothing but his own obstinate apostacy can separate him ; who has promised to make all things work together for good to his children ; and who, by this message of mercy, has converted the appalling attributes of his infinite nature into reasons of filial confidence. Unless the history of the past facts of the Christian system be connected with its present importance ; unless the work finished on Calvary be perceived in its relation to the

personal fears and hopes of ourselves as individuals; we do not understand, and therefore cannot believe the Gospel.

There is a belief in Christianity as a subject of controversy, which deserves a severer censure than merely that it is incapable of doing any moral good. The great facts of revelation are not the object of which this belief is the impression. The real object of faith in a believer of this order is, that his view is right, and that of his opponents wrong. The impression from this object is naturally approbation of himself and contempt of others.

A man who forms a judgment upon any subject on reasonable grounds, cannot but believe that an opposite judgment is wrong—if he does not believe this, he has formed no judgment on the matter. But this ought not to be the prominent object of belief. If it be, the character is ruined. There is not in the world a more hateful thing, than to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ converted into a piece of ambitious scholarship, or of angry contention—an angel of light and peace, transformed into the demon of pride, of darkness and discord. But the person who falls into this sinful calami-

ty, does not believe the Gospel; he believes in his own superiority and intelligence, and in another's inferiority and ignorance. These are his objects, and fatal must their impression be. The object presented to our faith in the Gospel, is the character of God manifested in Jesus Christ, as the just God and yet the Saviour. It is the remission of sins through the blood of atonement shed for us by love unutterable. It is God in our nature standing on our behalf as our elder Brother and Representative, bearing the punishment which we had deserved, satisfying the law which we had broken, and on the ground of this finished work, proclaiming sin forgiven, and inviting the chief and the most wretched of sinners to become a happy child of God for ever and ever. This object is presented to our belief, not as a theme of polemical discussion, but that it may stamp on our souls its own image, the likeness of God.

The precepts of Scripture describe accurately the effect which this faith will produce on the character. We are thus taught to refer the defects in our character to corresponding defects in our faith. We have either originally received an erroneous im-

pression of the Gospel, that is to say, we have misunderstood it, or else we have allowed, by forgetfulness, the right impression to die away. The doctrine of the atonement is the great spiritual mould from which the living form of the Christian character is to derive its features. Did we but fully and thoroughly yield ourselves to this mould, though we had never heard of the precepts, our hearts would present an exact tally or counterpart to them. But as our deceitful hearts are prone to leave this true mould of holiness and happiness, and to receive opposite impressions from the perishing things about us, it has pleased God to describe to us what we ought to be, as well in duty to Him as for our own peace, that by daily comparing ourselves with his law, we may daily see not only how greatly we need the blood which cleanseth from sin, but also how far our moral features are from the form of the Gospel mould, and how unsteady and unfrequent our view must have been of that truth which sanctifieth.

We are thus instructed also, to bring our views of doctrine, to the test of precept. If any view which is taken of the Gospel, does not naturally produce on the mind that

impression which is described in the precepts, it is evidently an incorrect view. Thus joy and love are commanded by the precepts; does our view of the doctrines naturally tend to produce these sentiments in us independently of our knowledge of the precepts and our efforts to obey them? This is a most important question, and it calls for a careful and honest investigation on the part of each individual. We shall illustrate it a little farther, that we may not be misunderstood. Christians are commanded to rejoice alway; and in the history which is given of them, we find that they did rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Now, we are certain that they could not rejoice merely because they were commanded to do so. A precept of this kind could not possibly enforce or elicit obedience to itself. The great use of the precept therefore is, that we may by it, as by a test, try whether our view of the Gospel is a right view, and whether our application to it is steady and constant. And this joy in the first Christians was not the result of a long process—they rejoiced as soon as they heard the Gospel, and continued rejoicing as long as they

lived. Their joy, therefore, did not proceed from the observation of any moral improvement which had taken place in themselves ; there was no time for that ; but it proceeded from their perceiving that the Gospel contained good news, perfectly adapted to persons in their circumstances of sin and sorrow. They perceived in it an announcement of pardon and favour from God to sinners, on account of a great work which preserved from all stain the Divine holiness, and which magnified the law and made it honourable. Whoever understands this, and believes it, must, from the nature of things, rejoice, if he knows himself to be a sinner, unless the spring of the mind is clogged or deranged by the disease of the body. A condemned criminal must rejoice in a pardon, unless he thinks that death is no evil, and life no blessing. But it is impossible that any one can think eternal misery no evil, or eternal happiness no blessing. And deliverance from the one, and an entrance into the other, are embraced in the announcement of the Gospel. “ This is the testimony that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son,” 1 John

v. 11. A want of joy must then proceed from some defect in the view which we take of the Gospel, or from the unfrequency of our viewing it, and the admission of opposite impressions from other things. If we wish to see the reflection of an object in a mirror, the object must be present to the mirror; so if we wish to rejoice, we must have the joyful object present to our minds. An attempt to feel the joy of the Gospel when the testimony of the Gospel is not present to our minds, is like an attempt to have an object reflected in a mirror, without presenting them to each other.

We are commanded to love God with all our hearts, and to hate sin and flee from it. Examine then whether your view of the Gospel is fitted to produce this result. For it is not by the direct attempt to excite and work up in ourselves these affections, that we can ever hope, in the nature of things, to render an acceptable obedience to this precept. For who can love, by endeavouring to love; or hate, by endeavouring to hate? No: We are not left to such a thankless task. In the Gospel, a view of God is presented which allures the love of

the heart, and calls forth its horror and indignation against whatever opposes His holy will. The law is written in our hearts by the belief of the Gospel. If our hearts really came in contact with the whole of the Gospel, the impression would be the whole of the law ; and we may determine how much of the Gospel we are yet strangers to, by observing how much of the law is yet unwritten in our hearts.

This is not only a just way of trying doctrines, it is also the true method of self-examination. The distance which lay between the throne of the universe and the death of the cross, is the measure at once of the love of God, and of the danger and guilt of sin. If there is not an impression on our hearts of holy love to God and of abhorrence of sin, it is because we either have a wrong view of the work of Christ, or because we do not view it at all. Let then the discovery of our spiritual deficiencies teach us to study the truth as it is in Jesus more attentively, and to cleave more closely to it ; and let it also constrain us to be instant in prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, whose office and prerogative it is to show the truth to the

hearts of men. For without his precious aid the truth cannot be perceived nor felt, and therefore cannot be believed. The attempt to cleave to the truth independently of divine aid, is as fruitless as the attempt to obey the precepts without a knowledge of the truth. This assistance is promised in answer to prayer; and the first fruit of its operation on the heart is the perception of the truth.

We are standing on the brink of eternity; in a few days we shall be launched into it. Let us look over the precipice before we make the awful plunge. It is a dark and untried region. Do you see any light, or will you commit yourself to chance? Oh, in the midst of that obscurity, there shines a bright Star, which, even whilst we gaze on it, sends its own blessed light into the heart, and expels thence all doubts and anxieties! The King of that country is he who died here for sinners. He loved us, and gave himself for us. And he hath gone to prepare a place for his people. If you belong to him, you are safe, and you may belong to him to-day. When he becomes your hope, you will have a joyful

hope—a hope that maketh not ashamed. But till then, there is no hope for you. With him is the fountain of life, that is, of happiness ; and we deceive ourselves when we look for true happiness elsewhere. When our hearts wander from him, they wander from life and joy. Abide in me, he says, and I will abide in you. What are all the promises which the world can make in comparison of this ?

SECTION VII.

OF THE SIMPLICITY OF FAITH, AND THE
CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND
JUSTIFICATION.

IT may appear to some that I have given rather a complex view of faith. Some writers have thought that they simplified faith very much, by saying that it is a mere assent to the truth of divine testimony. I consider it to be no more, in its own nature ; but does it not embrace a variety of truth, and is it not obvious then that its simplicity or complexness depends entirely on the nature of the testimony to which the assent is given ? An assent cannot be given to any thing without receiving an impression corresponding to it in all respects ; for the meaning of belief is just the impression made on the mind by the object presented to it. If the object be simple, the impression or belief will be simple ;

and if the object be a declaration involving a variety of subjects, the impression or belief will include them all. Now, as the Gospel addresses a variety of affections in the human mind, and manifests a variety of the Divine attributes, it cannot in one sense be called very simple; at the same time, as its meaning is level to the simplest capacity, that is to say, as the actions of which it gives the narration, do most *unequivocally* declare and set forth the principles from which they proceed; in this respect it may be called simple. Some, in contending for the simplicity of faith, are not satisfied with affirming that it is always the same in *itself* whatever be its object, and that it is nothing more than the belief of the testimony of a credible witness, which is certainly true; but they go so far as to maintain that the faith of the Gospel consists in the belief of the bare facts only of which it testifies, apart from their import. Now, this view of the subject is very much fitted to mislead. The faith of the Gospel, for instance, is not merely the belief of the *facts* that Jesus died and was raised from the dead, but also, and chiefly, of the *import*

of these facts. It is not merely the belief of an *insulated* truth, but of a testimony including a variety of truths, to all of which it gives credit. The Jewish elders and priests believed a bare fact when they were persuaded that the resurrection of Jesus had in reality taken place, while they did not believe the truths which are connected with and arise out of it. It is as *truths* or realities, that the doctrines of the Gospel are the objects of faith, but the belief of them includes a belief of their *qualities* or *properties*. The Gospel is not only a true saying, but a saying divinely excellent and supremely interesting and important ; and if it is not perceived in this light, then it is not believed to be what it is. In other words, *the truth* is not believed ; for it is as essential a part of the Divine testimony, that the Gospel is good news of a plan of salvation, which is full of God, and altogether worthy of him, and adapted to the chief of sinners, and free for their use, as it is that there is salvation at all, or that Jesus lived, and died, and rose again. He who does not understand the glorious *meaning* and *design* of these facts, does not be-

lieve the Gospel, because he does not believe what is an essential part of the truth,

Sometimes the expression *simple faith* is used to denote faith unaccompanied with strong feelings of hope and of joy, and such like sensations. This may respect certain parts of the truth which have the effect of producing an acknowledgment of the faithfulness and kindness of God, a conviction that his favour is the one thing needful, a renunciation of all other hopes, an expectation of deliverance, and a desire after God, while yet there is no joy, because other parts of the truth are not clearly discerned. Such a state of mind, in regard to the revelations made to David, is described in the 42d and 43d Psalms. Even in such cases, however, there is a kind and degree of sensation produced in correspondence to what is really believed, so that the expression in question is scarcely correct. Faith in the Gospel will produce peace and joy in proportion to its strength, except when disease or constitutional tendencies prevent its natural operation : and when these fruits are wanting, we may consider the question as put, Where is your faith? The human mind

is easily shaken. Pain or weakness, sorrow or anxiety, temptation or remorse, may distract the mind, and mingle their dark impressions with the glory of the Gospel salvation. It may please God to permit a jarring nerve, or a morbid sensitiveness of frame, to mar Christian joy even to the grave. It is seldom, however, that this state of mind, though the effect of natural causes, is *altogether* blameless. Has the Gospel remedy been steadily applied? Have self-indulgence and indolence been steadily resisted?

There is another meaning of the term *simplicity* when applied to faith, and that is unreservedness and unfeignedness of principle in religion, and an unquestioning dependence on the love of God in Christ, as the only hope and desire of the soul. This is the child-like spirit which is so much commended in Scripture, and holy peace dwells with it.

Some persons again, when they speak of *simple faith*, seem to view it as a mere absence of expressed dissent, or as a readiness to sign their names at the foot of a creed, or a set of church-articles, as a proffer of

their sanction and countenance to this or that system. To this it is a sufficient answer, that nothing can be correctly believed, unless it makes a correct impression on the mind. The belief is merely an appendage and seal to the impression; and unless our impression of Christianity correspond to all the high objects revealed in the Gospel, the simplicity of our faith will not ensure its goodness.

There is another way in which the expression *simple faith* is used, namely, to express the freeness of justification. We become interested in the salvation of the Gospel simply by believing the Divine testimony, and not as a reward of the spiritual fruits or accompaniments of our faith.—For the glory of Divine grace, then, and also for the steadiness of our own comfort and peace, it is of great moment that our ideas on this subject be distinct. When we confound faith with its effects, either immediate or remote, we mar the simplicity and the conclusiveness of the reasoning of Scripture on the total opposition between faith and works in the matter of justification.

This leads us to consider the connection between faith and justification. How, and why, are these two things connected? What is the meaning of such a sentence as this, "A man is justified by faith without works?" In such affirmations, the expression "by faith" means simply, the gratuitousness of the gift of pardon. Paul says, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace," or free mercy, Rom. iv. 16. Faith is here directly contrasted with works or merits, as it is also in all passages where justification is the subject. We have frequent examples in the Bible of the Gospel being stated without any mention of faith: Thus, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," 1 Tim. i. 15; as also 1 John v. 11. Luke xix. 10; These texts point to the will of God alone as the source of mercy, without making the slightest reference to any quality in man except his need. Faith then does not create nor produce pardon, nor does it receive pardon as a premium; and yet faith and justification are inseparable. What is the reason of this? we may, or rather we ought

to ask this question, for the Bible invites and encourages serious and humble discussion. The reason is evident. Faith as it looks to God, as it is the recipient of the glad tidings, marks the freeness of grace; for what act can be more void of merit, or of moral qualifications in general, than the mere belief of good news? Faith as it looks to man, as it brings the gospel to act on the mind, is the instrument of sanctification. Pardon could not be enjoyed by those whose characters were unrenewed, and faith is the only instrument by which a spiritual change can be effected. Pardon is bestowed on sinners, because Christ hath suffered the punishment which they deserved, and hath magnified the law which they had dishonoured—and not on account of any good thing in themselves. That a pardon has been freely proclaimed through Christ, is the very thing which we are called on to believe, and in believing this we come to the actual possession of it. The act of amnesty is antecedent to our belief, and independent of it—it remains firm and good, though we despise and reject it; but by so doing, we exclude ourselves from its operation. Each indivi-

dual becomes specially interested in this amnesty, by his belief of it—which special interest is called by the Scripture, justification. This belief gives the right direction to the affections, by presenting to them their proper objects—it restores their languid or feverish pulsation to a healthful tone—it expands and elevates them so, that they take delight in God, and in the way of all his commandments—it thus brings the worms of the earth into union with the King of Heaven; by introducing their hearts into the enjoyment of that glorious work, in which His infinite mind rests with eternal complacency. This is generally called sanctification, or the renewing of the heart, begun on earth, completed in heaven. It is a process perfectly reasonable and intelligible on the acknowledged principles of the science of the human mind. It is quite reasonable then, surely, in a moral point of view, that justification should be connected with faith in the Divine testimony, seeing that faith is intelligibly connected, by the very constitution of nature, with a restoration to that spiritual character, which can alone

fit for communion with God, or the happiness of heaven.

But still let it be distinctly remembered and felt, that the pardon of sin rests on a work altogether independent of the faith, or love, or obedience of man. The Friend, and Brother, and Representative of sinners, has borne "the chastisement of their peace," and satisfied the demands of justice on their behalf. The sentence has been executed, and the records of heaven bear that "it is finished." The Divine determination to pardon sinners through Christ, is freely and universally proclaimed as an act already passed, in the history of that great work on which it rests; and all are invited to come in and partake of the protection and healing influence of the pardon thus freely proclaimed. Those who believe in it are gradually sanctified by it. But let it not be supposed that they are gradually pardoned by it. The pardon was *virtually* obtained by Christ before they ever heard of it. By unbelief they would have excluded themselves from its protection, as well as influence, altogether. By

believing it, they come under its protection ; and, according to the degree of their faith, is their enjoyment of it, and their conformity to its spirit. He who believes the Divine testimony that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, is within the scope of the pardon ; but, according to the vividness, the constancy, and the distinctness of the impressions which this truth makes on his mind, will be his Christian stature and spiritual joy. We are told that in the heavenly world, there are great varieties of glory and happiness. The lowest seat in that kingdom into which neither sin nor sorrow enter, is surely far beyond the brightest conceptions of our earthly minds, and, Oh, how opposite to our deserts ! but yet we are encouraged to aim high, and to cultivate a holy ambition to be near and like our Lord. The way to this attainment is to walk by faith whilst we are here ; to have the cross and the glory of the Saviour ever present to the heart, as the springs of holy love and holy hope ; to receive the events and duties of life as the wholesome exercises by which he tries and strengthens the faith of his people : to look to him con-

tinually for abundant supplies of his comforting and quickening Spirit ; to consider ourselves as the blood-bought children of our Father, whose eye is ever upon us, whose ear is ever open to us, whose arm ever supports us, whose love changeth not ; and to be in longing and watchful expectation of the hour, when he will call us hence to the full enjoyment of our inheritance ; to feel that our eternity has already begun, that our final choice is irrevocably made, and that, in this world and out of this world, and in all possible circumstances of existence, Christ is and must be our only full and satisfying portion for ever.

My object in this Essay has not been to represent faith as a difficult or perplexed operation, but to withdraw the attention from the act of believing, and to fix it on the object of belief, by showing that we cannot believe any moral fact without entering into its spirit, and meaning, and importance ; that we cannot believe in our own danger without apprehension, or in our own deliverance without joy ; and that we cannot believe in generous compassion, or self-sacrificing benevolence, without having on

our minds at the time impressions corresponding to these affections ; just as we cannot believe in a colour, unless we recal to our minds the impression corresponding to that colour. Even had there been no mention of faith made through the whole Bible, it is yet evident to common sense that its communications could be profitable to none but to those who believed them ; and it is no less evident that, unless these communications are understood, they cannot be believed in their true meaning. Our business then is to understand the meaning of those communications which God has been pleased to make to us in his word, and to receive them as substantial realities, altogether independent of our admission or rejection. Certain facts have taken place, and certain principles exist in the government of the universe, whether we believe them or not. Our disbelief of them neither destroys their existence, nor takes from their importance ; they continue the same, and will continue to exercise an unlimited and uncontrollable influence over our destinies for ever. These facts and principles declare the character of God, and it is life eternal to know them.

To reject them, is to clash with Omnipotence ; and to be ignorant of them, is to be in moral darkness.

We must prosecute our inquiries on this subject, not as critics, or judges, or scholars, but as sinners. It is not an interesting exercise for our faculties, but a pardon for our sins, and a cure for our spiritual diseases, that we must seek after. If we seek, we shall find, and we shall find them in Jesus Christ. But the discovery, though it will gladden, will not elevate. The great end for which we are called on to believe the Gospel is, that we may be conformed by it to the likeness of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. Our obedience to the law of God is thus the measure of our faith in the Gospel. Holy love to God and man is the natural fruit of faith in the Gospel, and it is also the fulfilling of the law.

In conclusion, I would caution the reader (and I desire to take the caution to my own heart) against entering on the consideration of these things in his own strength. There is an agent necessary in this matter, whose operation is won-

derful, whose high and gracious office it is, to take of the things that are Christ's and show them to the souls of sinners, and without whom no son of man has ever believed unto everlasting life. An absolute, and child-like dependence on the Holy Spirit for light, and strength, and comfort, is a constituent part of the Christian character. The work of restoration, in all its parts, and in all its glory, is God's. The deepest humility is thus necessarily connected with the highest confidence. He who knows that the Almighty hath entered the field in this cause, and that on his arm the cause rests, will, while he feels his own utter insignificance, yet confidently anticipate the result. That anticipation must be weakened by whatever confidence he may place in himself. The assistance of this agent is one of the gifts which Christ now reigns to bestow. It is given to those who ask it, and those who receive it live with God for ever. Oh what will one day be the feelings of those who have not asked it, and therefore have not received it!

THE END.

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: August 2005

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 653 708 A

